

SAMUEL CHARAP, DARA MASSICOT, MIRANDA PRIEBE,  
ALYSSA DEMUS, CLINT REACH, MARK STALCZYNSKI, EUGENIU HAN,  
LYNN E. DAVIS

# Russian Grand Strategy

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Rhetoric and Reality



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## Preface

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This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Russian Grand Strategy Amid Resource Constraints*, sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, U.S. Army. The purpose of the project was to document the extent and limits of Russia's global ambitions; evaluate whether and how those ambitions are matched by resources and coherent defense policies; and assess the implications for the Army and U.S. national security, particularly for engaging Russia on a broad scale, including deterrence in Europe and managing Moscow's involvement in the Middle East, Asia, and post-Soviet Eurasia.

This research was conducted within RAND Arroyo Center's Strategy, Doctrine, and Resources Program. RAND Arroyo Center, part of the RAND Corporation, is a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) sponsored by the United States Army.

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## Summary

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*The research reported here was completed in September 2019, followed by security review by the sponsor and the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, with final sign-off in July 2021.*

The study of a state's grand strategy can provide key insights into the direction of its foreign policy and its responses to national security challenges. A *grand strategy* describes a state's most important and enduring interests and a theory for how the state will use its resources to defend or advance those interests given domestic and international constraints. A grand strategy also outlines a state's key assumptions about threats and provides clues about how the state's leaders are likely to interpret and respond to changes in the international environment. Grand strategy is more than just a collection of foreign policies; it is the underlying logic that explains how these policies will advance the state's interests. As the scholar Barry Posen explains, "grand strategy is a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself."<sup>1</sup>

Understanding Russia's grand strategy can help U.S. policymakers avoid strategic surprise at Russia's political, economic, and military behavior; anticipate Russia's actions and reactions; and assess the depth and nature of potential conflicts of national interest between Russia and the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 1.

Because grand strategy is more than a collection of proclaimed foreign policy goals, Russia's grand strategy must be understood through both a study of key documents and statements and a close empirical analysis of patterns of behavior. This report both documents Russia's stated grand strategy and tests key elements of it against the actions of the Russian state.

Based on an exhaustive review of Russia's official strategy documents, statements from its leaders, and a series of interviews conducted in Moscow, we outline the broad contours of Russia's stated grand strategy. Russian decisionmakers believe that the current international order is transitioning from a Western-centric, U.S.-led unipolar system to a polycentric world, where power will be more-equally distributed among a broader range of states. From the Kremlin's point of view, this transition is not only inevitable but also desirable, because it will result in greater global stability and prosperity and a more prominent role for Russia as a regional leader and major power. However, the transitional period itself will likely feature rising geopolitical instability and greater potential for conflicts, including those marked by a pernicious mix of internal unrest and external aggression. In particular, according to this perspective, the West will engage in destabilizing behavior as it resists its inevitable relative decline. Therefore, Russia will require a strong military to defend its national interests from a variety of threats, particularly those emanating from within its immediate neighborhood. Russia's aim is not only to ride out this unstable transition period but also to accelerate the shift when it sees opportunities to do so. After the transition to a polycentric world order is complete, Moscow expects a return to stability, characterized by cooperation among great powers that respect one another's vital interests. Russia believes it will be one among several leading centers of power, with a leadership role in post-Soviet Eurasia and global influence in key international institutions.

From this collection of broad themes and strategic visions, we examined and tested the following six elements of Russia's stated grand strategy:

1. Domestic instability and interstate war represent an increasingly integrated threat for which Russia must prepare.

2. Russia will pursue a benign leadership role in its immediate region to maintain its influence there.
3. Russia should be prepared to respond both to limited small wars on the periphery and to “non-contact” warfare contingencies with peer adversaries.
4. Moscow has little need to develop an expeditionary or extra-regional military capability, and will instead be focused on regional contingencies on its periphery.
5. Russia’s objective is not to weaken the West and Western institutions; Moscow seeks selective cooperation while taking steps to limit the West’s ambitions and change its foreign policy behavior.
6. Russia is pivoting its international political and economic focus toward what it calls “new centers of power”—e.g., Brazil, India, China, and the Gulf states, and the Asia-Pacific region—and away from the West, which it believes to be in relative decline.

We used these six elements of Russian grand strategy to generate hypotheses about corresponding actions and resource decisions. In other words, we outlined what behaviors would be expected if Russia’s behavior reflected its stated grand strategy. We then tested those expectations against empirical observations of Russian actions and resource decisions. A summary of our test results can be found in Table S.1.

Fuller assessments of Russia’s adherence to the six elements of its stated grand strategy follow:

1. *The Kremlin is attempting to ensure that resource decisions reflect the conclusion in its stated strategy that external aggression and internal threats are increasingly integrated.* Moscow is creating a flexible command and legal structure to integrate military and internal security forces so that they can support one another in a crisis.
2. *Russian stated strategy prioritizes post-Soviet Eurasia, but Moscow lacks a coherent and consistent approach to the region.* Although Russia is the dominant regional power in post-Soviet Eurasia, Moscow’s level of political, economic, and military influence

**Table S.1**  
**Comparing Grand Strategy with Actions and Resource Decisions**

Strategy Element	Test Results	Actions Consistent with Grand Strategy?
1. Internal and external threats increasingly integrated	Military and internal security forces are increasingly integrated.	Yes
2. Benign leadership approach to neighborhood	No single approach exists; behavior is inconsistent from country to country.	Mixed
3. Russia should prepare for non-contact warfare and small conflicts along its border	Non-contact warfare remains important, but a shift was detected post-2014 toward larger-scale ground warfare.	Mixed
4. Regional power projection over expeditionary military capability	Military is postured for conflict on border, not large-scale out-of-area operations.	Yes
5. Objective is to cooperate selectively while limiting Western ambitions, not weaken the West	Interference behavior suggests aggressive intention, but efforts to cooperate are ongoing.	Mixed
6. Pivot away from the West to "new centers of power"	Quantitative evidence of engagement shows a pivot away from the West that accelerates after 2014.	Yes



varies from country to country. With its closer allies, Moscow generally pursues less-coercive means of achieving desired outcomes, but it does resort to coercion and even military force to try to prevent defection to Western-led integration projects. Some post-Soviet Eurasian states can resist Russian economic agreements or withdraw from Russia-led security organizations without punitive actions, so long as the states remain neutral or nonaligned with Russia's competitors.

3. *Russia's military actions since 2014 reveal a partial divergence from its stated strategy's emphasis on non-contact warfare and smaller-scale conflicts, and suggest a greater emphasis on warfare at a larger (regional) scale.* Russian military actions and behaviors in recent years are evolving in a way that is partially inconsistent with its stated strategy: Instead of prioritizing the aerospace domain and developing light or mobile ground forces as was envisioned in strategic documents, since 2014 Russia's army, marine, and airborne units have become larger and more-heavily armored. Most of these force-posture adjustments are clustered in southwestern Russia near Ukraine, suggesting that Russia views Ukraine as an ongoing source of instability for years to come.
4. *Russia does not prioritize developing the forces necessary to be a global expeditionary military power and is primarily oriented toward regional contingencies.* As seen in Syria, Russia can deploy a small expeditionary force of around 5,000 personnel, assuming uncontested entry and a viable deployment route. Russian expeditionary capabilities will remain limited through 2025 and beyond because Russia lacks key pillars for an expeditionary force, such as sufficient strategic lift or a foreign basing network.
5. *Since 2014, Russia has taken actions vis-à-vis the West that seemed aimed at weakening it and are inconsistent with Russia's ongoing efforts to cooperate with the West in other policy areas.* Moscow pursues cooperation while simultaneously taking steps seemingly aimed at weakening the West; this strategy has thus far proven highly counterproductive for Russia.
6. *Russia is devoting considerable time, resources, and effort to reorienting its global engagement away from the West and cultivating*

*relationships with what it considers to be “new centers of power.”* This trend was evident as early as 2012, but Russian political and economic engagement with Western countries declined precipitously after 2014.

## Overarching Implications

These six discrete analyses suggest five overarching implications for understanding the evolution of Russian grand strategy.

*Russia’s stated strategy can generally be considered a reliable predictor of the state’s efforts.* Usually, Moscow attempts to match its actions with its words. However, its efforts at times fall short of its rhetoric. Moreover, Russian stated strategy tends to articulate specific—if, at times, lofty—ambitions, while Russian actions and resource decisions to effectuate that strategy appear to be more experimental, ambiguous, and reactive.

*Russia has reacted to the Ukraine crisis and subsequent breakdown in relations with the West in ways that cause its behavior to diverge from its stated strategic goals.* These events have had dramatic consequences that have altered Russia’s political, economic, and military outlook. Moscow’s reactions to the major exogenous shock of the Maidan revolution in Ukraine can account for several of the divergences between its stated strategy and its demonstrated behavior.

*Insufficient economic resources and a lack of political influence limit Moscow’s ability to realize its stated objectives.* Russia faces multiple challenges in implementing its lofty ambitions, given its shaky economic foundations and the opposition to its plans even in post-Soviet Eurasia, its immediate neighborhood, let alone at a global level. Resource limitations impose structural constraints on Russian behavior, preventing Moscow from, for example, attracting its neighbors with the prospect of greater prosperity.

*Russian strategy prioritizes threats and thus implies acceptance of certain risks in lower-priority areas. In practice, however, Russia seems unwilling or unable to accept these risks, and thus allocates resources in ways that*

*are inconsistent with its stated strategy.* The Kremlin sees threats emerging from many areas, domains, and countries. The Russian leadership's pervasive insecurity and related attempts to create buffers against instability on multiple fronts—domestic or interstate, regional or global—often prevent effective implementation of stated strategy while further constraining Russia's already limited resources.

*Our analysis does not suggest that Russia's revealed grand strategy is fundamentally divergent from its stated one.* The divergences between stated strategy and observed behavior discussed in this study seem to be element-specific and contingent rather than systematic. Russia does not achieve true leadership in its neighborhood largely because of resistance to its objectives from neighboring states; in most cases, Moscow settles for less than its sought-after level of control if it encounters that pushback, with the prominent exception of Ukraine. Large-scale ground warfare seems to have returned to Russian force planning because of a contingent event—the war in Ukraine. Finally, when the Kremlin could not achieve a relationship on its desired terms with the West, after 2014 it resorted to assertive tactics that are too controversial to include in a stated strategy. In all three of these cases, Russia *attempted* to implement stated strategic objectives but was forced to adapt those objectives to new realities that emerged.

## Considerations for U.S. Army Planners

Our study of Russian grand strategy points to several considerations for U.S. Army planners and other U.S. policymakers.

*Strategic competition will remain most intense around Russia's post-Soviet Eurasian periphery.* Russia uses coercion (including, at times, military force) in the region not to impose total control but to prevent neighboring states from integrating with rival economic and security blocs.

*Moscow will continue to diversify its foreign policy portfolio away from the West; over time, this diversification could lessen the impact of sanctions or other Western leverage.* Russia will continue political, economic, or military cooperation with states it considers to be rising

powers, such as China, India, and other leading states in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific regions.

*Russia's defense budget has plateaued to 2021, but its military requirements have not.* Given that Russian defense spending is expected to be stagnant through 2021, it is unlikely that the military will be able to excel at the multiple priorities it is pursuing simultaneously: fighting in Ukraine and Syria; raising personnel readiness to a high level; modernizing the conventional force; modernizing the nuclear force; developing hypersonic weapons and other next-generation technologies; and training for larger-scale combat operations, which Russia has been trying to do since 2014. The desire to excel in all of these fields is understandable, given the wide variety of threats that Russia's stated strategy stipulates. However, Russia will struggle to develop a superpower's portfolio of tools with a constrained defense budget.

*Russia might revise its military doctrine in the coming years to bring it into alignment with Moscow's recent resource decisions.* If recent military behaviors are accurate indicators, then such a revision would include a greater emphasis on large-scale interstate military clashes.

*Russian training events will continue to grow larger and more complex in the coming years, and might soon include all four military districts, as Moscow emphasizes larger-echelon combat.* Despite the impressive size of these exercises, Russia remains structurally unable to support a protracted large-scale war with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

*Russian special forces, private military contractors, and intelligence operatives will increasingly be used abroad, including in areas where the U.S. military is present.* U.S. commanders and defense policymakers should consider creating rules of engagement or standard operating procedures for interacting with such groups when their affiliation is ambiguous, particularly in congested battlespaces.

## Acknowledgments

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## Abbreviations

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ALCM	air-launched cruise missile
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
BTG	battalion tactical group
C4ISR	command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
CAA	Combined Arms Army
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMD	Central Military District
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal Security Service
GDP	gross domestic product
GLONASS	Global Navigation Satellite System
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff
IC	Intelligence Community
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Internet Research Agency

KSO	Special Operations Command
MD	military district
MPK	intergovernmental commission
MRLS	multiple rocket launcher system
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OFDI	outward foreign direct investment
PMC	private military contractor
RDIF	Russian Direct Investment Fund
SAP	State Armaments Program
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SDO	state defense order
SMD	Southern Military District
SOE	state-owned enterprise
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations
VDV	Airborne Troops
VKS	Aerospace Forces
VTa	military transport aviation



## Introduction

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Understanding Russia's grand strategy is critically important for the United States. This understanding could provide insight into Russia's political, economic, and military behavior and help U.S. policymakers forecast Russian actions and reactions, assess the depth and nature of potential conflicts of interest between Russia and the United States, and prevent strategic surprise. The fundamentals of Russian grand strategy have not been comprehensively explored in recent years. This report aims to fill this gap.

The study of a country's *grand strategy*—i.e., “a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself”—provides key insights into the direction of its foreign policy and its responses to national security challenges.<sup>1</sup> A grand strategy outlines a state's key assumptions about threats and provides clues about how a state's leaders are likely to interpret changes in the international environment. Such a strategy is the “intellectual architecture that gives form and structure” to a country's foreign policy and provides “a set of ideas for deploying a nation's resources to achieve its interests over the long run.”<sup>2</sup>

Identifying a state's grand strategy presents many challenges, given that grand strategy cannot be captured in a single document

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<sup>1</sup> Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 1. There is no single, widely used definition of grand strategy. We address definitional issues in greater depth in Chapter Two.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don't Come Home, America: The Case Against Retrenchment,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 3, Winter 2012–2013, p. 11.

and a state's behavior can diverge from its declared objectives. Written strategy might be more ambitious than a country's resources can support, domestic political factors can cause deviations, major international events can force assumptions to be called into question, and strategy pronouncements can be used to deceive an adversary. Russia's grand strategy, therefore, must be understood through both a study of key documents and statements and a close empirical analysis of patterns of behavior. This report therefore describes Russia's *stated* grand strategy and compares it with the country's foreign policy behavior and resource decisions—which, collectively, can be thought of as Russia's *revealed* grand strategy.

Chapter Two of this report provides a richer definition of the concept of grand strategy and an analytical framework for assessing it. We document the broad contours of Russia's stated grand strategy in Chapter Three through an exhaustive review of official documents, leaders' statements, and expert interviews.

To identify Russia's revealed grand strategy, we chose six elements from the broad outline of its stated strategy, which we describe in Chapter Three. These six were chosen because they are central to Russia's overall strategy, important for U.S. interests, subject to debate among Russia scholars and the broader policy community, and salient for both U.S. government and, specifically, U.S. Army planning. For each of these six strategy elements, we developed a hypothesis for what we would expect in terms of Russian behavior and resource decisions. We then assessed whether there is a match between these expectations and reality.

In Chapter Four, we analyze the strategic claim that Russia makes about the increasing integration of external and internal national security threats. Do the state's decisions reflect this judgment? (Appendix A provides in-depth data on these decisions.) In Chapter Five, we examine Russia's stated strategy vis-à-vis its immediate neighborhood. Does Moscow's behavior diverge from its ambitions for benign regional leadership; and, if so, how and why? In Chapter Six, we test the claims in Russia's stated strategy regarding the nature of future warfare. Do the military's actions reflect the preparation for the aerospace wars that this strategy anticipates?

Chapter Seven discusses Russia's lack of a grand strategic requirement for an expeditionary military. Do Russia's resource decisions and actions follow that directive? In Chapter Eight, we take a critical look at Russia's objectives toward the West. Is recent Russian behavior consistent with its claims of selective pushback and selective cooperation? In Chapter Nine, we examine Russia's claim that its international engagement is, in fact, following the power shift away from the West and toward new centers of power described in its strategy. (The data set we created to examine this claim is provided in Appendix B.) In Chapter Ten, we draw out crosscutting implications from our analysis and specify particular considerations for U.S. planners.



## A Framework for Analysis of Russia's Grand Strategy

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There is no single, widely used definition of *grand strategy* in the political science literature.<sup>1</sup> However, over time, analysts have generally come to a consensus about its key characteristics: grand strategy describes a country's most important and enduring interests and a theory for how it will use its resources to defend or advance those interests, given domestic and international constraints. As the scholars Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth explained, "the descriptor 'grand' captures the largescale nature of the strategic enterprise in terms of time (long-term, measured in decades), stakes (the interests concerned are the large, important, and most enduring ones), and comprehensiveness (the strategy provides a blueprint or guiding logic for a nation's policies across many areas)."<sup>2</sup>

An early scholar of grand strategy, Basil H. Liddell Hart, separated military strategy from the broader integration of all instruments of national power to achieve a nation's long-term interests during wartime.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent definitions have preserved the focus on long-term

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of historical uses of the more general term, strategy in the West, see Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013; Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. For a critical view of common usages of the terms *strategy* and *grand strategy*, see Hew Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy," *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 3, Autumn 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd revised ed., New York: Meridian, 1991.

interests, but expanded the scope of grand strategy beyond wartime. The historian Paul Kennedy, for example, argued that grand strategy is how a state's leaders "bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests."<sup>4</sup>

Grand strategy is not concerned with all long-term foreign policy goals, only the most significant interests a nation seeks to advance or defend.<sup>5</sup> The political scientist Christopher Layne, for example, explained that "grand strategy is about determining a state's vital interests—those important enough to fight over—and its role in the world."<sup>6</sup> Some scholars of grand strategy focus specifically on how a state secures itself against threats.<sup>7</sup> However, other scholars expand the definition to include core non-security goals that a nation might pursue.<sup>8</sup>

Grand strategy involves identifying available resources, allocating them, and generating plans for how to mobilize them in pursuit of the state's goals.<sup>9</sup> Although grand strategy tends to be concerned with national security, the means of grand strategy are not restricted to military tools. As Hart's early definition suggested, a state needs to consider all the resources and tools available: military, economic, and political.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 5. For a similar view, see Edward Mead Earle, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1943. Freedman explained that "strategy suggests an ability to look up from the short term and the trivial to view the long term and the essential" (Freedman, 2013, p. ix).

<sup>5</sup> Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 1; Liddell Hart, 1991; Posen, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> The scholar Thomas Christensen expanded on the political and economic aspects of grand strategy, noting that domestic politics can constrain foreign policy options and domestic economic policies can affect available financial resources (Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful*

Finally, grand strategy is more than just a collection of foreign policies; it is the underlying logic that explains how these policies will advance the nation's interests. As the scholar Barry Posen explained, "grand strategy is a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the historian Hal Brands refers to grand strategy as "the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy."<sup>12</sup> Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth define grand strategy as "a set of ideas for deploying a nation's resources to achieve its interests over the long run."<sup>13</sup> Although grand strategy is concerned with connecting means with ends, it is not necessarily a detailed, actionable plan that can hold up over the long term. Grand strategy can be better understood as a state's "way of thinking" about how to achieve its goals in an uncertain and dynamic international environment.<sup>14</sup>

## The Value of Understanding Another State's Grand Strategy

Understanding other states' grand strategies can help the United States anticipate the broad outlines of those countries' foreign policies, their responses to changes in the international environment, and sources of future conflict. Grand strategy can be a useful guide to the overall direction of a state's foreign policy.

States develop a grand strategy for practical reasons. The process of formulating it not only helps leaders clarify their thinking about the state's role in the world but also guides the rest of government. As Colin Gray explained, strategy is not about just goals, but it is a bridge, a way

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*Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Posen, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, 2012–2013, p. 11. See also Brands, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Hew Strachan, "Strategy and Contingency," *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 6, November 2011, p. 1281.

of explaining how the state's means will be used to achieve its political goals.<sup>15</sup> Although bureaucracies do not always perfectly translate strategy into policy, top political leaders are more likely to intervene to ensure that policies pertaining to the most important national security matters are consistent with their stated grand strategy.<sup>16</sup> The more a particular state uses strategy formulation and strategic documents for managing internal processes, the more likely the documents are genuinely reflective of leaders' priorities rather than irrelevant, incomplete, or intentionally deceptive in nature.

A state's grand strategy offers clues about how its leaders are likely to interpret changes in the international environment. Because grand strategy is forward-looking, it makes assumptions about an uncertain future environment. When that environment changes in a significant way, leaders will have to adapt their plans. A grand strategy outlines the key assumptions that leaders hold about how the international system works. These preexisting beliefs can affect how leaders interpret new information, such as changes in another state's defense spending or new economic trends. When the international environment is particularly complex or uncertain, leaders are even more likely to rely on their preexisting intellectual framework.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding another state's grand strategy can also help the United States avoid *mirror imaging*, or assuming that another state will interpret signals in the same way that the United States does. With a clear understanding of how another state thinks about the world, the United States can better anticipate how that state might respond to international trends or U.S. policy changes.

Understanding another country's grand strategy can help the United States assess the depth and nature of potential conflicts of inter-

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<sup>15</sup> Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel W. Drezner, "Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times," *Foreign Affairs*, July–August 2011, pp. 61–62; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976.



est with it. Grand strategy prioritizes a nation's interests and describes its leaders' beliefs about the threats to those interests—and the opportunities to advance those interests. By understanding both the threats and opportunities expressed within another state's grand strategy, the United States can identify where conflicts of interest might exist and how substantial they might be. Even if fundamental conflicts of interest do not exist, a clash can still result from the ways in which two states advance or defend their interests. An understanding of another state's grand strategy can help identify ways to anticipate, avoid, or manage such conflict.

## Challenges in Identifying a State's Grand Strategy

Written documents can be a helpful starting point for understanding another state's grand strategy. Significant elements of a country's grand strategy can be captured in a single document. The United States, for example, produces a national security strategy. However, these formal documents might not contain all aspects of a grand strategy. Moreover, grand strategy does not necessarily have to be generated through a formal process, published in a written form, or contained in a single document. Policymakers formulate grand strategy whenever they prioritize a country's interests and decide how to pursue them using the resources available. In these cases, the underlying logic of a grand strategy must be inferred from a broader range of statements by foreign policy decision-makers and from an analysis of patterns of national behavior.<sup>18</sup>

Strategy documents have four additional limitations. First, the documents might be more ambitious than a state's resources can support. The documents might be intentionally aspirational, or an inef-

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<sup>18</sup> Dueck, 2008, p. 1; Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 17–19; Narizny, 2007, p. 9; Brands, 2014, p. 6.

fective state might overestimate its ability to mobilize the resources at its disposal.<sup>19</sup>

Second, domestic political factors can cause day-to-day deviations from a grand strategy. Bureaucrats might not always follow the strategy. Government organizations might be fragmented by issues and regions, leading to incoherent policies.<sup>20</sup> Interest groups might successfully lobby for policies on specific issues that deviate from the strategy. In the extreme, disagreements between foreign policy elites could be so substantial that a state cannot generate a coherent or consistent strategy. In these cases, state behavior “will be shaped less by a grand design than by the pulling and hauling of various interests, ideas, and political calculations.”<sup>21</sup>

Third, the complexity and uncertainty of international politics make it difficult for leaders to anticipate all of the factors that can affect future policy choices. In the end, leaders may be reactive and handle things on a case-by-case basis.<sup>22</sup> Even in periods when the United States has had relatively clear strategic motivations, such as during the administration of President Harry Truman, there has been “improvisation” as new problems have emerged.<sup>23</sup> Although strategy documents are meant to have a longer time horizon than policy doc-

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Monaghan, *Power in Modern Russia: Strategy and Mobilization*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Monaghan, 2017, pp. 30–31, 42–46; Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, “Introduction: Debating America’s Future,” in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America’s Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2012, p. 10; Brands, 2014, pp. 12–15.

<sup>21</sup> Jervis argued that after the Cold War, the absence of a significant national security threat would lead to divergent views about U.S. foreign policy and would prevent a coherent grand strategy (Robert Jervis, “U.S. Grand Strategy: Mission Impossible,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Summer 1998).

<sup>22</sup> David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, “Delusions of Grand Strategy: The Problem with Washington’s Planning Obsession,” *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2015; Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Fall 2000; Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy: U.S. Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Brands, 2014, p. 57.

uments, unexpected changes in the international system can cause a strategy to shift over time.

Finally, although strategy documents have important functions for internal state processes, they are also read by external audiences. For this reason, a state might keep some of its efforts hidden. Meanwhile, the documents that *are* made publicly available could be designed to have a deterrent or even what the Russians call “reflexive control” (i.e., manipulative) effect on external audiences.<sup>24</sup> A strategy document could, in theory, be used to deceive an adversary about a state’s intentions or to justify foreign policies to domestic audiences. For example, a revisionist state could theoretically use its strategy documents to signal benign intentions and lull other states into a false sense of security.

## Analytical Framework

To describe Russia’s grand strategy, we organized information from publicly available sources into four core elements: a set of beliefs about how the international system works, a prioritized set of interests, an assessment of the threats and opportunities the country faces in the international system, and a logical approach for how to use all tools of national power to achieve its goals.<sup>25</sup> The remainder of this section describes these core elements of a grand strategy—and our corresponding analytical framework—in greater detail.

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy L. Thomas, *Kremlin Kontrol: Russia’s Political Military Reality*, Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Robert J. Art, “Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, Winter 1998, p. 79; Brands, 2014, p. 1; Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, 2012–2013; Dueck, 2008, p. 1; Goldstein, 2005, pp. 17–19; Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998; Kennedy, 1991; Liddell Hart, 1991, p. 323; Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996–1997.

### Beliefs About the International System

Analysts describe grand strategy as the “theory” or “intellectual architecture” that informs foreign policy choices.<sup>26</sup> Such an architecture arises from deeper beliefs about how the international system works. A state’s views about the sources of national power (e.g., economic or military), its own relative power, the causes of conflict between states, and the fragility of the international system can all affect the state’s grand strategy.<sup>27</sup> These beliefs affect how a state perceives its own interests and the tools that could be most useful in advancing them.

### Interests

Grand strategy is concerned with *vital* interests—interests that relate to a state’s survival.<sup>28</sup> Put another way, vital interests are those “whose costs to the nation are somewhere between severe to catastrophic if not protected.”<sup>29</sup> States have longer lists of *important* interests and concerns, which we define as interests that a state cares about but would be willing to sacrifice to protect its vital interests. For instance, analysts of American grand strategy list a U.S. vital interest as homeland security, while the spread of democracy and the protection of allies are usually considered important interests.<sup>30</sup>

### Threats and Opportunities

Traditionally, analysts of grand strategy have focused on how a given country assesses and responds to threats in the international environment.<sup>31</sup> In other words, grand strategy is about how a state seeks to

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<sup>26</sup> Brands, 2014, p. 1; Posen, 1984, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Posen and Ross, 1996–1997.

<sup>28</sup> Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Art, 1998, p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> Some, such as Press, list democracy promotion as a concern rather than an important interest; Art, 1998, pp. 83–97; Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Summer 1997; Press, 2005, pp. 26–27.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Posen, 1984, p. 13; Posen, 2014.

defend against possible losses from threats, such as increased defense spending of a geopolitical rival or economic shocks that could undermine a state's basis of power. However, some states could also have more-expansive aims to pursue in the international system, and so our definition also allows for the possibility that a grand strategy might identify opportunities for gain.<sup>32</sup> The decline of a geopolitical rival could, for example, afford such opportunities.

### **Logic and Tools**

Grand strategy involves determining what resources a state should devote to its foreign policy goals and how to use those resources to achieve its desired objectives. Grand strategy typically focuses on military, economic, and diplomatic tools, such as military spending, alliance commitments, forward troop deployments, foreign aid, and diplomatic initiatives.<sup>33</sup> Less-obvious elements of grand strategy include public willingness to support and bear the costs of a chosen strategy.<sup>34</sup>

A state's decisions about which tools are most promising come, in part, from its beliefs about how the international system works. For example, historically, a widely shared belief among U.S. policymakers has been that economic interdependence between states increases the cost of war, which, in turn, makes war between major powers less likely. As a result, promotion of an open trading system has long been seen as a critical tool for advancing not just U.S. prosperity but U.S. security.<sup>35</sup>

## **Methodology and Sources**

### **Identifying Russia's Stated Grand Strategy**

This report describes these four core elements of Russia's stated grand strategy as derived from official strategy documents, statements by senior officials, writings of Russian strategists, and interviews. As

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<sup>32</sup> Narizny also defines grand strategy more broadly (Narizny, 2007, pp. 8–9).

<sup>33</sup> Dueck, 2008, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Christensen, 1997, pp. 11–14.

<sup>35</sup> Dueck, 2008, p. 2; Layne, 1997, pp. 90–91.

noted previously, written strategy documents are often a useful starting point for understanding a state's grand strategy. These documents can reflect leaders' genuine beliefs about, and logical approach to, a country's most pressing questions, especially when these documents guide other government activities.<sup>36</sup> As a result, scholars of American grand strategy frequently begin with these documents.<sup>37</sup> Key Russian strategy documents—such as the Foreign Policy Concept, National Security Strategy, Military Doctrine, and so-called May Presidential Decrees (issued at the beginning of President Vladimir Putin's two most recent presidential terms, in 2012 and 2018, respectively)—are useful starting points because these documents are often used to set foreign policy priorities, guide military developments, and shape budgets.

Because a state's grand strategy is not fully contained in such documents, we use three tiers of sources in addition to this first tier of the main Russian strategy documents. The second tier consists of policies, laws, and statements from Russia's civilian and military leadership. The third includes the views of Russian foreign policy elites, as expressed in publications of influential advisers or well-connected Russian think tanks. In addition to examining elite opinions expressed in publications, we conducted interviews with over two dozen Russian analysts and several officials in Moscow in March and April 2018. In total, we analyzed around 200 unique sources. Finally, we consulted Western literature on Russian strategy and held a day-long workshop with prominent Russia experts at the RAND Corporation's Washington, D.C., office.

It should be noted that the sources in our third tier are anything but uniform. There are several opinions within the Russian elite on key strategy issues. However, using our analytical judgements, we have attempted to distill what can be thought of as mainstream or most-widely held views. This approach admittedly results in less-than-

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<sup>36</sup> Fontaine and Lord, 2012, p. 6; Brands, 2014, pp. 7–8.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 3, Fall 2003.

systematic coverage of Russian views on grand strategic issues, and, by definition, somewhat simplifies nuanced positions. Yet it proved an effective means of explicating the relatively dry official strategy documents and providing necessary context.

To bound our analysis, we selected 2012, the year Putin returned to the presidency for his third term, as our starting point, because many new strategies and policies were generated or updated shortly thereafter.

### **Identifying Russia's Revealed Grand Strategy**

As discussed in the previous section, there are several reasons why a state's grand strategy in practice can diverge from its declarations. Rigorous analysis of a state's grand strategy, then, requires assessing whether its actions and resource decisions are consistent with its statements. Therefore, after describing Russia's stated grand strategy, we assess whether the stated grand strategy is reflected in its behavior and resource decisions. Put another way, we use Russia's stated grand strategy to generate hypotheses about these behaviors and resource decisions and then test them against empirical evidence.

We applied our analytical framework to our collected sources on Russian strategy to identify key themes. We describe Russia's grand strategy using this framework in Chapter Three. Chapters Four through Nine assess six important elements of Russia's stated grand strategy relating to the country's interests, the threats it faces, and its approach to the world. These six elements of Russian grand strategy were chosen because they are important for U.S. interests, have been debated by experts, and have had meaningful implications for U.S. government and, specifically, U.S. Army planning. These elements were also chosen to be testable in the sense that they could be compared with observable actions and resource decisions.





## Russia's Stated Grand Strategy

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Russia's stated grand strategy is based on a belief that the global order is in transition. According to this view, the current international system has been destabilized because of an imbalance of power that emerged after the end of the Cold War when the United States became the sole hegemon. During this period of unipolarity, the world was shaken by disruptive crises in Iraq, Serbia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. In Russia's view, these events occurred because of the lack of a counterweight to the United States and its allies that could constrain their efforts to remake the world in their image. This unipolar moment is now ending, and the international system is transitioning toward a polycentric world order. Rising great powers, such as Russia and China, are acting independently of—and, at times, in confrontation with—the United States to protect their national interests; and, in the process, they are restoring a balance of power that once provided stability to the international system. According to Russia's stated grand strategy, Moscow's growing assertion of its interests in international affairs will inevitably lead to increased tensions with the West; the latter will seek to resist Moscow's and other rising powers' increased roles in an attempt to hold on to a fading hegemonic position in a rapidly changing world. In this chapter, we outline Russia's stated grand strategy in greater detail according to the four categories identified in the previous chapter: beliefs about the international system, interests, threats and opportunities, and logic and tools.

## Beliefs About the International System

According to Russia's strategic documents, the international system has entered a period of transition following a temporary unipolar moment that had allowed the United States to shape the global order according to its interests as others looked on. This unipolarity was unsustainable, in Moscow's view; a balance of power is required for the system to function properly.<sup>1</sup> The sole superpower simply manipulated the system to achieve its goals. Senior Russian officials believe that the United States dominates the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Group of Seven (G7), the World Bank, and other institutions, and that the United States has forced other participants to bend to its will in setting international security, economic, and financial policies. In the view of these officials, this imbalance has led to significant instability and punitive measures toward rivals.

Lacking a strategic competitor after the end of the Cold War, according to prevailing views in Moscow, the United States and its Western allies embarked on a quest toward universal liberal democracy through interference in the affairs of nation-states, using both military and nonmilitary means. Russian strategic documents frequently cite NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia, U.S. support for revolutions across the former Soviet Union and the Middle East, and "reckless" military interventions in Iraq and Libya as symptoms of the instability caused by a system dominated by a single superpower.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the West's attempt to monopolize control over the global financial system or to introduce punitive sanctions for political purposes has disadvantaged the "non-Western" aspirants attempting to integrate into the system on a level playing field.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksei Miller and Fyodor Lukyanov, *Otstranennost' vmesto konfrontatsii: postevropeiskaya Rossiya v poiskakh samodostatocnosti*, Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Karaganov, *Strategiya dlya Rossii: Rossiiskaya vneshnyaya politika: konets 2010-x nachalo 2020-x godov*, Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Miller and Lukyanov, 2016.

In the unipolar period, many in Moscow came to believe that Russia's interests were ignored and its status as a great power was not recognized. As consequential geopolitical decisions were made, Russia—lacking a strong economy, political influence, or a capable military—was, at times, a disgruntled bystander. Prominent Russian strategist Andrei Kokoshin notes that, up to the early 2000s, Russia could not pursue an independent foreign policy—a key component of what he considers to be national sovereignty—under these conditions.<sup>4</sup>

According to Russian grand strategy, the world has begun to shift toward a polycentric order in which “new centers of power” and alternative models of development are emerging. From this perspective, the transition will be characterized by growing interstate tensions as competition between rising and declining powers increases.<sup>5</sup> This competition will largely center on the question of how the key principles of the international system will be defined and by whom.<sup>6</sup> As one Russian strategist put it in interviews for this report, if the current world order is a “soft empire” with the United States on top, then “Russia is a rebellious province of the global empire. The polycentric world will happen when several rebellious provinces secede from the empire.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Russia's stated grand strategy, the United States is unwilling to accept the changing distribution of power and operates as though it were still in a position to dictate the rules of the game to others. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov elucidated this view during a 2018 press conference: “Unfortunately, our American colleagues and their allies still want to operate only on the basis of dictates and ultimatums. They do not want to listen to the views of other centers of world politics, thereby refusing to accept the realities of the

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<sup>4</sup> Andrei Kokoshin, “Natsional'nye interesy, real'nyi suverenitet i natsional'naya bezopasnost',” *Voprosy filosofii*, Vol. 10, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, *Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, Moscow, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> President of Russia, *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2016b.

<sup>7</sup> Authors' interviews with Russian analysts and officials, Moscow, March–April 2018 (hereafter, described as *authors' interviews*).

emerging multipolar world.”<sup>8</sup> But the era of unchecked unilateral sanctions, extraterritorial application of U.S. law, the use of force without the United Nations (UN) Security Council approval, and other activities that were possible in the unipolar period is coming to a close given the growing clout of China, Russia, and others.<sup>9</sup> As Lavrov noted:

I don't believe the Western countries should be really offended or should feel that their contribution to the world civilization has been underestimated—not at all. It's just the time when no one can do it alone, and that's how we [Russia] feel. It's a polycentric world. Call it multipolar, call it polycentric, call it more democratic—but this is happening. And economic might, financial might and the political influence associated with all this, they're much more evenly spread.<sup>10</sup>

### Russia's Place in the International System

Seeing itself as a recovering, or even ascendant, great power, Moscow believes that it has an integral role to play in reestablishing a balance of power in the international system. Russia seeks to consolidate its “status as a leading world power, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world,” according to Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy.<sup>11</sup> The country's permanent membership on the UN Security Council, its large and nuclear-capable military, its significant natural resources, and its other endowments should ensure that Moscow takes part in forming the international agenda.<sup>12</sup> Further solidifying Moscow's view of its place in the hierarchy of states is the renewed ability to more-actively

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V.Lavrova v khode press-konferentsii po itogam deyatel'nosti rossiiskoi diplomatii v 2017 godu, Moskva, 15 yanvarya 2018 goda,” webpage, January 15, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Sergey Lavrov, “Sergey Lavrov: The Interview,” *National Interest*, March 29, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> President of Russia, *O Strategii natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2015a.

<sup>12</sup> President of Russia, “Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu,” December 1, 2016d.

use its forces to resolve or prevent international military conflicts.<sup>13</sup> The Kremlin touts its intervention in Syria as an example of the role Russia can play in protecting the sovereignty of states and fighting terrorism.<sup>14</sup>

Russian elites believe the West to be in a fitful state of decline, while new emerging powers—such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—are ascendant.<sup>15</sup> Russia sees opportunities to fill the strategic void on multiple continents, including Africa and South America, as the influence of the United States on world affairs wanes and as regional organizations assume a prominent role in the resolution of local disputes.

## Interests

### Being Recognized as a Great Power

Connected with Russia's desired role in the international system is its interest in being acknowledged as a great power, as determined by its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, possession of a credible strategic nuclear and nonnuclear deterrent capability, and the ability to conduct an independent foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> In its National Security Strategy, Russia lists among the country's primary national interests "consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>14</sup> President of Russia, "Zasedanie Mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba 'Valdai,'" webpage, October 19, 2017c.

<sup>15</sup> President of Russia, "Doktrina informatsionnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii," 2016a.

<sup>16</sup> Kokoshin, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

### Leading Post-Soviet Eurasia

Russia seeks to establish and lead the post-Soviet Eurasian region in the polycentric world.<sup>18</sup> Regional leadership is the most prominent and consistent foreign policy focus in Russian grand strategy.<sup>19</sup> As Putin began his third term as president in 2012, he outlined a vision to create a Eurasian Union “capable of becoming one of the poles of the modern world” that would “serve as an effective ‘bridge’ between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region.” An integrated, Russia-led post-Soviet Eurasia is central to Moscow’s leadership role in the emerging order. “Eurasian integration is a chance for the [region] to become an independent center of global development, rather than be a periphery of Europe or Asia,” according to Putin.<sup>20</sup>

Russian leaders believe that any Western attempts at countering Eurasian integration are antithetical to the country’s national interests. As one interviewee put it, “We cannot exclude other powers from the region, but we just don’t want the West to transform these countries into anti-Russian ones.”<sup>21</sup> Russian documents state its intention to promote the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and other regional structures to maintain regional influence and to uphold its mutual defense and security cooperation agreements with its regional allies.<sup>22</sup> Tensions in the South Caucasus and damaged relations with Ukraine are now considered sources of instability on Russia’s southwest flank and require increased attention.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Post-Soviet Eurasia* is defined here as the eleven non-Russian former Soviet republics, excluding the three Baltic states.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014. For example, in the 2014 Military Doctrine, five of six listed priority areas for military-political cooperation remain in the post-Soviet space: Belarus, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states.

<sup>20</sup> President of Russia, “Poslanie Prezidenta Federal’nomu Sobraniyu,” webpage, December 12, 2013c; President of Russia, “Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba ‘Valdai,’” webpage, September 19, 2013b.

<sup>21</sup> Authors’ interviews.

<sup>22</sup> Ivan Yegorov, “Who Manages Risks,” *Defense and Security*, Vol. 974, November 7, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Yegorov, 2016.

### Partnering with “New Centers of Power”

Russia's grand strategy prescribes a dynamic and cooperative relationship with other “new centers of power,” such as China, India, Brazil, the leading members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Persian Gulf states.<sup>24</sup> These powers will increasingly shape the structure and norms of the future international order, and Russia seeks to cultivate relationships with them. Russia's strategy lays out hopes of pursuing comprehensive cooperation with China in particular and of engaging with other Asia-Pacific states along multiple fronts.<sup>25</sup>

### Cooperating Selectively with the West

In contrast to their enthusiastic embrace of new centers of power, Russian decisionmakers are quite pessimistic about prospects for cooperation with the United States and Europe moving forward.<sup>26</sup> The tone in Russian strategic documents shifts between combativeness and despondency about the current state of relations with the West. Russia's stated strategy identifies several Western policies that threaten Russian national interests: NATO enlargement, force posture enhancements near Russian borders, and regime change.<sup>27</sup>

Russian strategists acknowledge that the United States (and, to a lesser extent, the EU) will remain a major player in the polycentric world order of the future.<sup>28</sup> Russia asserts that it seeks cooperation on shared challenges, such as arms control, nuclear nonproliferation, counterterrorism, and settlement of regional conflicts.<sup>29</sup> The stated strategy notes Russia's willingness to cooperate with NATO on equal terms, in

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<sup>24</sup> President of Russia, 2015a; Aleksei Podberezkin, *Strategicheskoe prognozirovanie i planirovanie vneshnei i oboronnoi politiki*, Vol. 1, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MGIMO-Universitet, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> President of Russia, 2016b.

<sup>26</sup> Yegorov, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> President of Russia, 2016d. See also President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>28</sup> Authors' interviews.

<sup>29</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

accordance with “international law, transparency, and predictability.”<sup>30</sup> In Moscow’s view, the United States and Russia have a special responsibility and requirement to work together in key areas because of their leading roles on global strategic stability and international security. As noted by Foreign Minister Lavrov in a televised interview,

Russia and the United States [...] must search for ways to work together on the most complicated issues around the world, such as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and strengthening strategic stability. The role of Russia and the United States is unique in these spheres, as everyone admits. No other country can take their place.<sup>31</sup>

## Threats and Opportunities

Russia’s stated strategy suggests that instability in the international order will intensify as new centers of power continue to emerge over the next decade, and as such previously dominant powers as the United States fight to retain their position. As Russia pursues an independent foreign policy to protect its regional and global interests and to consolidate its position “as one of the centers of influence in the modern world,” it forecasts an increase in instability, competition, and threats.<sup>32</sup> According to its strategic documents, Russia must be prepared for an expanding spectrum of global challenges and threats caused by the transition to the polycentric world order. Russian military leaders have stated that this global power shift has been accelerating in recent years, and the potential for international disorder and conflict resulting from it is high.<sup>33</sup> The Russian military and internal security forces must

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014; President of Russia, 2016b.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Interv’yu Ministra inostrannykh del’ Rossii S. V. Lavrova kurdskomu telekanalu ‘Rudav,’” webpage, July 24, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>33</sup> “U.S.’ Commitment to Global Dominance Leads to Transnational Struggle—Gerasimov,” TASS, March 24, 2018.



therefore be capable of countering a wide variety of threats, from low-intensity counterterrorism missions to rapidly escalating regional conflicts to high-intensity nuclear war.<sup>34</sup>

NATO force-posture enhancements and enlargement closer to Russia's borders are perennial concerns and described as a "main external military danger" in the military doctrine.<sup>35</sup> U.S. missile-defense plans and the implementation of the Prompt Global Strike concept are considered to be significant disruptors of strategic stability because of their potential to undermine Russia's ability to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to threats of a military nature, Russia increasingly sees the employment of nonmilitary measures, such as the manipulation of the global information space, as a key threat to national security. The activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Western institutions are assessed to be undermining domestic stability in Russia.<sup>37</sup> The array of stated internal threats to Russian domestic stability include

- mass protests and "color revolutions,"<sup>38</sup> or other use of nonmilitary measures to foment instability
- attempts to use technology to undermine sovereignty and stability
- terrorism (carried out by both domestic and foreign fighters)
- cyberattacks on critical infrastructure
- social and economic inequality.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Scott Boston and Dara Massicot, *The Russian Way of Warfare*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-231-A, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>37</sup> Miller and Lukyanov, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> *Color revolutions* refer to allegedly externally financed or fomented mass protests against the government that can culminate in regime change. This term has been applied to such changes of power in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>39</sup> V. V. Gerasimov, "Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii," *Voенно-Promyshlennyyi Kur'er*, February 27, 2013b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Konventsiiya ob obespechenii mezhdunarodnoi informatsionnoi bezopasnosti (kontseptsiiya)*, Moscow, 2011; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine reflected these beliefs about the changing nature of warfare, with particular emphasis on the blurring of the line between nonmilitary and military methods. Furthermore, according to the Doctrine, information (both as a tool and as a warfighting domain) is assuming greater prominence in modern conflicts and could be used to threaten Russian sovereignty and national interests.<sup>40</sup> As the 2014 Doctrine noted, "there is a new tendency to shift military dangers and military threats into the information space and internal sphere of the Russian Federation."<sup>41</sup>

Several months before signing the 2014 Military Doctrine, Putin stated that while there was no direct military threat to Russia, thanks to its nuclear deterrent, "[t]he very notion of state sovereignty is being eroded. Undesirable regimes, countries that conduct an independent policy or that simply stand in the way of somebody's interests get destabilized . . . [through] so-called color revolutions."<sup>42</sup> The Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, stated in a 2015 interview that color revolutions orchestrated by hostile external powers were a threat to Russia's national security.<sup>43</sup> Russia's Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, addressed the issue in a 2017 speech before Russia's Academy of Military Sciences, stating, "The emphasis in the methods of confrontation is being shifted toward the widespread application of political, economic, diplomatic, information, and other non-military measures, which are realized in the activation of the protest potential of the population."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014. See also President of Russia, "Doktrina informatsionnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii," 2016a.

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014. See also President of Russia, 2016a.

<sup>42</sup> President of Russia, "Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu," webpage, December 4, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Elena Chernenko, "'Za destabilizatsiei Ukrainy skryvaetsya popytka radikal'nogo oslableniya Rossii,'" *Kommersant*, June 22, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> V. V. Gerasimov, "Vystuplenie nachal'nika General'nogo shtaba Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii—pervogo zamestitelya Ministra oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii generala armii Valeriya Gerasimova na otkrytom zasedanii Kollegii Minoborony Rossii 7 noyabrya 2017 g.," Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Statement by Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation—First Deputy Minister of Defense of

Yet Russia has clearly not lost sight of traditional military challenges. In the same speech before the Academy of Military Sciences, Gerasimov pointed out that military violence is still very much a part of resolving interstate (and intrastate) conflicts. The war in the former Yugoslavia, the U.S. overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and the Syrian conflict all involved traditional methods of warfare, and Gerasimov suggested that the role of military force will not lose its relevance in the foreseeable future. He and other strategists have argued that warfare with a peer in the 21st century is unlikely to take the form of a protracted, large-scale land war, and is most likely to feature attacks in depth from precision-strike weapons during what is called *non-contact warfare*. According to Russian military strategy, future warfare with an advanced opponent will likely take the form of a *non-contact war*, in which air forces, long-range precision strike weapons, cyber and space attacks, weapons based on new physical principles, and special operations forces strike territory in depth and destroy critical infrastructure, government, economic, and military targets. Russia must be prepared to defend against this type of war and develop its own capabilities for non-contact warfare while maintaining the capacity to respond rapidly to limited wars along its borders.<sup>45</sup> In 2016, Gerasimov noted that “the primary method for achieving military objectives [in modern warfare] are non-contact actions against the enemy through the massive employment of precision-guided, long-range munitions from air, sea, and space.”<sup>46</sup>

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the Russian Federation, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, at an Open Meeting of the Collegium of the Russian Defense Ministry on November 7, 2017,” November 7, 2017c.

<sup>45</sup> Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War,” *Military Thought*, No. 10, 2013; Nikolai Makarov, “The Most Important Task of Military Science Is to Develop a Concept of Nontraditional Wars and Armed Conflicts,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 35, 2011; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014; Nikolai Makarov, “Kharakter vooruzhennoi borby budushego, aktualnye problemy stroitelstva i boevogo primeneniya vooruzhenykh sil RF v sovremennykh usloviyakh,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 31, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> V. V. Gerasimov, “Organizatsiya oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii v usloviyakh primeneniya protivnikom ‘traditsionnykh’ i ‘gibridnykh’ metodov vedeniya voyny,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 55, 2016.

Although Russian policymakers expect the transition to a polycentric world to be turbulent, they also see opportunities on the horizon. The ongoing redistribution of global power, when it has been fully realized, ultimately will have a stabilizing effect on the international system. In contrast to the volatility of the current international system and the grim near-term outlook for the international order, Russia's strategic documents present an idealized—if not idealistic—view of the future. Putin has argued that extended periods of peace historically have been based on a balance of power along the lines of what is now emerging.<sup>47</sup> Russian stated strategy envisions a future polycentric world characterized by predictability, cooperation, and stability and led by great powers. Under this new, more equitable, and mutually beneficial system, great powers will be the centers of gravity in their respective regions, red lines will be clearly delineated and understood, problems will be negotiated collectively as needed, and there will be no unilateral actions whereby one great power achieves its national security at the expense of another.<sup>48</sup> National sovereignty and great power—bargaining will be hallmarks of this future.<sup>49</sup> Fair global economic competition will displace the currently skewed trading order, and unilateral economic sanctions will be a tool of the past.<sup>50</sup>

As the power shift accelerates, Russia will seek a corresponding recognition of the changing geopolitical dynamic within the international system. An updated system that is more representative of the emerging polycentricism will retain the primary institutions established after World War II, in particular the UN and its Security Council, while increasing the influence of such countries as China, India, and Brazil within those institutions and bolstering the clout of regional organiza-

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<sup>47</sup> President of Russia, "Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu," December 3, 2015e.

<sup>48</sup> President of Russia, 2013b; President of Russia, 2015a; President of Russia, 2016b.

<sup>49</sup> The difference between Russian strategy and practical implementation (Russian behavior with respect to Ukraine, Georgia, and much of the rest of post-Soviet Eurasia, for example) suggests that noninterference in internal affairs is a courtesy extended only to other great powers and not to smaller neighboring states.

<sup>50</sup> President of Russia, *Strategiya ekonomicheskoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2030 goda*, 2017a.

tions. Current and new regional security organizations will assume a prominent role in the resolution of disputes. In this future polycentric world, Russia hopes to position itself as an ascendant leader, a champion of national sovereignty, and a stabilizer.<sup>51</sup> The expectation is that Russia will continue to play prominent roles in organizations, such as the UN, and will demonstrate regional leadership through organizations, such as the EAEU, the SCO, the CSTO, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and ad hoc multilateral groups, such as the recent Syria summits conducted with Syria, Iran, and Turkey.<sup>52</sup>

Russian stated strategy envisions a diminished—but not destroyed—West in the future polycentric order. Specifically, extra-regional interventionism (projecting military, economic, and political power outside its region) will be moderated as Western power wanes.<sup>53</sup> In the future world order, as Russia sees it, the United States will no longer be the dominant superpower, nor will it unilaterally set international norms or agendas.

It is also important to consider what Moscow's stated view of the future world is not. Russia does not claim to seek to replace the United States as the sole superpower, nor do Russian strategic documents express a plan to recreate the Soviet Union; there are no mentions of imperialist ambitions or doctrinal directives for using military force to achieve dominance over neighbors (notwithstanding some recent examples to the contrary, as discussed in Chapter Five).

## Logic and Tools

For Russian leaders, a key tool to shape the contours of a more-representative international system is military might. As Putin noted, “our place in the modern world will be defined only by how success-

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<sup>51</sup> President of Russia, 2013b; President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>52</sup> President of Russia, “Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba ‘Valdai,’” October 27, 2016c.

<sup>53</sup> President of Russia, 2016c.

ful and strong we are.”<sup>54</sup> According to one prominent Russian expert, only through strength can Russia avoid becoming a vassal state to other great powers, such as the United States or China, in the future.<sup>55</sup> Russia’s influence and independent foreign policy will be underwritten by not just a modern military but also a more-diversified and self-sufficient economy, with globally competitive exports (particularly in high technology development).<sup>56</sup> As Gerasimov said in 2016, “Preparation for and the conduct of the armed defense of the country cannot be limited to only military measures and requires the consolidation of effort of practically all the organs of state authority.”<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned previously, Russia’s stated strategy calls for military and internal security forces capable of countering a wide variety of threats.<sup>58</sup> However, prominent military strategists have also argued that the center of gravity of future wars is increasingly shifting to the aerospace and information domains and that protracted World War II–style conflicts are increasingly unlikely.<sup>59</sup> Stated Russian strategy does not call for a global military presence, bases abroad, or requirements for an expeditionary force. For the most part, the emphasis appears to be on regional threats.<sup>60</sup>

To that end, and in the anticipated context of rising confrontations between emerging great powers and the United States, Rus-

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<sup>54</sup> John Kampfnr, “Who Is in Putin’s Inner Circle?” *The Telegraph*, March 23, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Timofei Bordachev, “Peace Through the Balance of Power: Strategic Importance of New Russian Weapons,” blog post, Valdai Discussion Club, March 8, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> President of Russia, 2015a; “Razgovor s Vladimirom Putinyim. Prodolzhenie. Polnii tekst programmi,” *Vesti.ru*, December 16, 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Gerasimov, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Boston and Massicot, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, “The Essence and Content of the Evolving Notion of War in the 21st Century,” *Military Thought*, Vol. 1, 2017; Oleg Falichev, “Budushchee zakladyvaetsya segodnya. Teoriya stroitel’sva Vooruzhennykh Sil dolzhna maksimal’no sootvetstvovat’ kharakteru gryadushchikh voyn,” *Voennoe Obozrenie*, March 14, 2013; Makarov, 2010; Nikolai Makarov, “Speech Before the Academy of Military Sciences,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 39, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

sian stated strategy asserts that Moscow is concentrating its efforts on “strengthening internal unity of Russian society; ensuring social stability, interethnic accord, and religious tolerance; eliminating structural imbalances in the economy and modernizing it; and increasing the defense capability of the country.”<sup>61</sup> Built on this foundation of shoring up internal stability, Russia seeks credible military capabilities to “strengthen [Russia’s] international positions” and to increase its role in shaping a multipolar world.<sup>62</sup> As Putin noted in 2015, “Military power is, of course, and will remain for a long time a tool of international politics.”<sup>63</sup>

In a significant departure from Soviet-era documents, Russia’s stated strategy today makes no mention of exporting the country’s domestic model to other states. As Putin put it, “Countries like Russia [that] can rely on a thousand-year history are many in the world, and we have learned to value our identity, freedom and independence. At the same time, we do not aspire to global domination, nor to expansion . . . nor to confrontation.”<sup>64</sup> Rather, stated strategy implies that Russia should build an attractive brand, of sorts, that appeals to countries outside the liberal Western order and tradition. This brand appears to have three main characteristics: policies and behaviors based on transactional diplomacy, regionalism, and respect for national sovereignty.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>62</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin: Byt’ sil’nymi: garantii natsional’noi bezopasnosti dlya Rossii,” *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, February 20, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> President of Russia, “Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba ‘Valdai,’” October 22, 2015d.

<sup>64</sup> President of Russia, 2016c.

<sup>65</sup> President of Russia, *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ‘O merakh po realizatsii vneshnopoliticheskogo kursa Rossiiskoi Federatsii’ ot 7 maya 2012 goda No. 605*, 2012. Specifically, Russia will protect its national interests on the basis of “pragmatism, openness, and a diversity of orientation [ . . . ] in the new polycentric system of international relations.”

## Selecting Key Elements

We chose six elements from the broad outline of Russia's stated strategy described previously to examine in greater detail. These six were chosen because they are central to Russia's overall strategy, important for U.S. interests, subject to debate among Russia scholars and the broader policy community, and salient for U.S. government—and, specifically, U.S. Army—planning. For each of these six strategy elements, we developed a hypothesis for what we would expect in terms of Russian behavior and resource decisions based on stated Russian strategy. In Chapters Four through Nine, we explore each element in detail by comparing them with observable actions of the Russian state. The six elements of the strategy are as follows:

1. Internal and external threats are increasingly integrated.
2. Russia will pursue a benign leadership approach in its neighborhood.
3. Russia should prepare for non-contact warfare and small conflicts along its border.
4. Regional power projection is a greater priority than global expeditionary military capability.
5. The objective is to cooperate selectively while limiting Western ambitions, not to weaken the West.
6. Russia will pivot away from the West to “new centers of power.”



## Strategy Element: Integrated Threats Require an Integrated Response

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### Stated Strategy

Russian strategy holds that interstate conflict and domestic instability are increasingly linked, and its adversaries could use a mixture of both against Russia, simultaneously seeking to destabilize its society or overthrow its government from within while conducting traditional military operations. Recent speeches from Russian leaders have articulated the need for an integrated response to this integrated threat.

Russian strategic documents often define internal security threats as terrorism, separatism, extremism, or color revolutions. External threats are often defined as interstate conflicts or wars and transnational issues, such as climate change or pandemics. Russia's concerns about malign foreign involvement in domestic affairs of other countries have been intensifying following multiple color revolutions in former Soviet republics in the early 2000s and the Arab Spring in 2011. Russian leaders have also claimed that external actors supported protests in major Russian cities following the flawed 2011–2012 election cycle.<sup>1</sup> The Kremlin has enacted several laws in recent years designed to limit

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<sup>1</sup> Russian concerns with internal instability have gone through three major phases in the post-Soviet era. In the 1990s, when the country's military and internal security forces had all but collapsed, Russia contended with political disintegration and separatism challenges, including two wars in Chechnya. By the 2000s, Russia faced significant terrorism challenges. During that decade, Russia was buffeted by multiple hostage crises, terrorist attacks against military bases in the North Caucasus, and so-called black widow suicide bombings ("Putin Says U.S. Stoked Russian Protests," Reuters, December 8, 2011).

foreign influence in Russian society, such as a 2012 law that gave the government the right to label any Russian NGO that engages in “political activities” and receives funding from abroad as a “foreign agent.”<sup>2</sup>

The assessment that foreign actors would use nonmilitary pressure to agitate a population or oust a government has only hardened since Ukraine’s Maidan revolution in 2014. Russian strategy documents published after that event warned that “the practice of overthrowing legitimate political regimes and provoking intrastate instability and conflicts is becoming increasingly widespread.”<sup>3</sup> The Military Doctrine of 2014 also included information about internal threats for the first time. The Doctrine notes

the tendency to shift military dangers and military threats into the informational space and internal sphere of the Russian Federation . . . the use of information and technology for military and political purposes . . . directed against the sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of states . . . the subversive activity of special operations and organizations of foreign states and coalitions against the Russian Federation [and] information activity to impact the population.<sup>4</sup>

Russia’s stated strategy suggests that whole-of-government responses are needed to address these complex and integrated threats. For example, Russia’s 2015 National Security Strategy calls for improving crisis response and mobilization readiness, integrating military forces with federal agencies, and securing the domestic information space against malign internal and external influences.<sup>5</sup> Expanding on themes contained in multiple Russian strategy documents, in a March 2019 speech, Gerasimov said that Russia will need integrated “classical and asymmetric methods of action” to defend against increas-

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Ridgwell, “Russia’s Foreign Agent Law Has Chilling Effect on Civil Society Groups, NGOs,” *Voice of America*, January 24, 2018. Authorities expanded this label in 2018 to include state-sponsored media operating in Russia.

<sup>3</sup> President of Russia, 2015a.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> See sections 26, 34, 41, and 47 in President of Russia, 2015a.

ingly complex national security threats consisting of both nonmilitary and military components. Gerasimov pointedly attributed this type of warfare to the United States and its allies:

Its essence lies in the active use of the “protest potential of the fifth column” in the interests of destabilizing the situation while simultaneously launching precision weapon attacks on critically important targets.<sup>6</sup>

## Evaluation Method

To develop a framework for our assessment, we considered how a nation-state might allocate its assets to prioritize domestic threats, external threats, or both. Scholar Thierry Gongora offers three approaches that states could adopt to address primarily internal threats, primarily external threats, or a balance of both domestic and external threats, detailed in Table 4.1.<sup>7</sup>

Using Gongora’s model, we can extrapolate several expected observable actions and resource decisions for each of the priorities. Table 4.2 lists the specific observable behaviors consistent with the three alternatives.

To test whether Russia’s actions have been consistent with this stated element of its strategy, we first evaluated resource allocations for internal and external threats using a review of the federal budget to determine whether one set of threats is prioritized over the other, or whether both are comparably resourced. Although comparing budgets cannot reveal a state’s specific capability to address an integrated threat, federal spending patterns can be used as a proxy for leadership’s priorities and threat perceptions.

In addition, to consider how Russia might be refining its forces to prepare for the complex and integrated threats described in its stated

<sup>6</sup> “Vektory razvitiya voennoi strategii,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, March 3, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Thierry Gongora, “The Meaning of Expeditionary Operations from an Air Force Perspective,” paper presented at Seapower Conference 2002, Halifax, Canada, June 7–9, 2002.

**Table 4.1**  
**Prioritization of National Security Threats**

Nature of Threat to National Security	Corresponding Priority	Benefits	Risks
Primarily internal (e.g., domestic terrorism, population unrest, separatism)	Forces geared to counter internal threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase regime stability via domestic policing or surveillance</li> <li>• Lower defense spending, smaller military</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller military reduces ability to defend interests abroad, possibly territorial defense</li> <li>• Assumes few threats from abroad</li> </ul>
Primarily external: threats to state from abroad (e.g., territorial defense, expeditionary operations)	Forces structured to counter external threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-equipped military, strong defensive and offensive capabilities to support national interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High defense spending, potentially at cost to domestic programs</li> <li>• Assumes stability at home</li> </ul>
Internal and external threats	Forces balanced to counter both	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility and capability against many types of threats, from internal to external</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most expensive option, introduces constraints and stretches capacity during simultaneous crises</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Gongora, 2002.

**Table 4.2**  
**Threat Perceptions and Expected Observable Actions and Resource Decisions**

Threat Perception	Observable Actions and Resource Decisions
Internal threat dominates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large internal security force, small military with limited expeditionary or homeland defense capability</li> <li>• Specialized forces for policing and riot control</li> <li>• Significant domestic surveillance (police state)</li> <li>• Military and internal security training are distinct, do not operate together</li> <li>• Low defense spending, high internal security spending</li> </ul>
External threat dominates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large military, small internal security force</li> <li>• Specialized forces designed for combat operations (e.g., units have extended-range weapons)</li> <li>• Domestic surveillance not a priority</li> <li>• Military and internal security training are distinct, do not operate together</li> <li>• High defense spending, low national security spending</li> </ul>
Combination, or balanced threat assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparable force size for military and internal security forces</li> <li>• Flexibility in legal or command relationships, mobilization</li> <li>• Moderate domestic surveillance programs</li> <li>• Balanced spending between defense and national security spending</li> <li>• Integrated training and operations</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Gongora, 2002.

strategy, we evaluated key capability enhancements to the military and internal security forces. We assessed whether the Russian government is making appropriate structural modifications to its armed forces and internal security forces via new legislation, policies, or training that would allow it to coordinate or synchronize activities to address the type of integrated threats outlined in the stated strategy. We considered other aspects of Russian behavior to determine whether Moscow is taking concrete steps to better respond to these integrated threats, such as establishing linked command and control relationships.

If there is an alignment between Russia's stated grand strategy and its resource decisions, we would expect Moscow to make decisions that create a dynamic or flexible force consistent with the balanced threat assessment in Table 4.2. These resource decisions would manifest as well-funded military and internal forces, legal or command and

control relationships between the two to facilitate working collaboratively for crisis response, and some evidence that the two conduct joint training events or joint operations. If there is misalignment between stated strategy and behavior, that would likely manifest in the form of budgets skewed significantly in favor of one priority over the other, or military and internal security forces with no legal relationship or practical interaction with one another to resolve integrated challenges.

## Evaluation

### Integration via Legislation, Command Relationships, and Training

Our examination revealed that Russia is actively revising the legislation, governmental structures, and command relationships necessary to improve the coordinated use of military forces and internal security forces to respond to an integrated threat, consistent with Russia's stated strategy. This process accelerated in 2013 after several years of election protests in Moscow and other major cities. These efforts appear designed to better organize and prepare Russia's security forces for a variety of internal and external threats and to mobilize the state for crisis response against diffuse and rapidly evolving threats.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Monaghan has described this effort as *state mobilization*: Russia's whole-of-government effort to integrate, organize, and control all relevant state resources during a period of national crisis or war. The Russian word for mobilization, *mobilizatsiya*, has historically had purely military connotations, such as calling up a large base of military reservists and transitioning the country's resources to a wartime footing. *Mobilizatsiya* is defined as a complex of state measures for activating the resources, strengths, and capabilities for the achievement of military-political goals. Mobilization involves transitioning the Armed Forces, economy, and state institutions to martial law and higher readiness, and general mobilization of the reserves. These legacy military connotations remain, but the term is now increasingly applied to other spheres outside a military context, such as economic reforms, politics, information security, and government efficiency. As Monaghan notes, Russian mobilization is "no longer about mobilizing the nation, *levée en masse* style, but about attempting to create sufficient strength in the system" to respond to crises. He notes that these policies are "a deliberate attempt to generate power and an acknowledgment of the problems that Moscow faces, both in terms of a complex and potentially hostile international environment and the dysfunctionalities of the Russian system (Andrew Monaghan, *Russian State Mobilization: Moving the Country on to a War Footing*, London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, May 2016, p. 31; Monaghan, 2017).

### **Legislation and Policy Revisions**

Since 2012, Russia has accelerated efforts to update policies and laws to improve whole-of-government crisis response for integrated internal and external security challenges. Initial attempts in 2012 to exercise military control over civilian entities during crisis exercises revealed gaps in legislation, funding, and understanding of civil defense requirements. Afterward, the Ministry of Defense took an active role in improving crisis response and mobilization mechanisms. The Ministry requested—and the Kremlin granted—the authority to train regional and local governments on how to support mobilization and civil defense measures in wartime.<sup>9</sup> The Kremlin has reportedly fired at least one governor for not performing well during this type of training.<sup>10</sup> In 2013, the Russian government broadened its concept of territorial defense to include countering enemy covert operatives or agitators seeking to destabilize the Russian homeland from within, requiring greater coordination between the military and internal security forces.<sup>11</sup> The Russian government updated its law *On Mobilization* in 2013 and 2015 to outline civilian and government responsibilities during a period of mobilization and approved the *National Defense Plan 2016–2020*. Although the Defense Plan is not publicly available, other information describing its purpose suggests that it clarifies coordination requirements and command authorities among government organizations, the military, and certain industries and establishes requirements for procurement, territorial defense, civil defense, and other crisis response activities.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> V. V. Gerasimov, “The Role of the General Staff in the Organization of National Defense in Accordance with a New Provision on the General Staff Confirmed by the President of the Russian Federation,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 1, No. 46, 2014b.

<sup>10</sup> Monaghan, 2017, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> V. V. Gerasimov, “The Primary Tendencies in the Development of the Forms and Methods of Employing Armed Forces and the Present Tasks of Military Science to Improve Them,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 1, No. 42, 2013a; Gerasimov, 2014b.

<sup>12</sup> President of Russia, “Prezidentu predstavlen Plan oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” January 29, 2013a; V. V. Gerasimov, “Experience of Strategic Leadership in the Great Patriotic War and the Organization of Unified Command of Defense of the Country in Modern

### **Force Size**

Comparing the authorized strength of active-duty military billets with internal-security billets does not provide clear insights into the ability of Russia to address an integrated threat. The ability of these forces to coordinate with one another to address an integrated threat, which we analyze later, is arguably more revealing. Nevertheless, there is value in considering the two force sizes. There are one million authorized active-duty billets in the Ministry of Defense, and around 420,000 internal security troops in the National Guard, Federal Security Service (FSB) Border Guards, and various riot control forces.<sup>13</sup> The relative sizes of Russia's military and internal security forces suggest that Russia maintains a balanced overall posture.

### **Readiness**

Russia has improved the readiness of both its military and internal security forces, which will improve crisis response in a general sense. However, readiness enhancements observed to date do not appear to be specifically related to military and nonmilitary security forces working better together against an integrated threat as described in Russian strategy.

In 2008, Russia comprehensively reorganized and modernized its military as part of the “New Look” Defense reforms (addressed in detail in Chapter Six), requiring all remaining forces to be “permanently ready”—the highest category of readiness. In 2016, Russia likewise comprehensively reorganized and consolidated its internal security agencies into the new National Guard to improve readiness and efficiency. Beginning in 2012, both the military and internal services

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Conditions,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 51, 2015; “Plan oborony Rossii na 2016–2020 gody vveden v deistvie,” RIA Novosti, January 1, 2016; authors’ interviews.

<sup>13</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2018*, Vol. 118, London: Routledge, 2018; Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, Washington, D.C., 2017; Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective–2016*, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R--4326--SE, December 2016, p. 71. Russia’s estimated two million military reserve billets are not included in this estimate.



have been subjected to frequent rapid-reaction drills to test readiness, but these are not joint events that mix the two groups.<sup>14</sup>

### The National Guard

As Russia's internal security force, the National Guard (Rosgvardia) inherited the missions of its subsumed organizations: maintaining public order, emergency response, riot control, enforcing martial law, counterterrorism, and defending critical targets. The National Guard is armed with its predecessor organizations' equipment, including armored vehicles, artillery, helicopters, and riot control, emergency response, and other specialized assets.<sup>15</sup> The National Guard differs from the organizations it subsumed in two key ways: It reports directly to the president, and its troops can be used abroad in support of the military.<sup>16</sup> This consolidation of Russian internal security forces into an agency that reports directly to the president has the appearance of a praetorian guard in many respects. According to one former senior adviser to the National Guard, it was created to deter or stop color revolutions, even though that purpose is not listed in any official documentation.<sup>17</sup> The missions of the National Guard are as follows:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Monaghan, 2017, pp. 74–75; “Vnutrennie voiska MVD RF proveli ucheniya v usloviyakh, skhozikh s Maidanom,” RIA Novosti, April 9, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Margarete Klein, “Putin’s New National Guard: Bulwark Against Mass Protest and Illoyal Elites,” *SWP Comments*, No. 41, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, September 2016.

<sup>16</sup> “Russia’s National Guard Could Take Part in Peacekeeping Operations Abroad,” Sputnik, April 11, 2016; “National Guard to Complete Assigned Missions both in Russia and Abroad,” TASS, June 27, 2018. An earlier draft decree suggested that the “National Guard’s personnel could be used on orders by the Russian president in operations aimed at maintaining or restoring global peace and security,” but this mission is not currently included in the National Guard’s missions.

<sup>17</sup> Yurii Baluevskii, “Voina ne konchaetsya, ona—zamiraet,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, May 26, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Federal Service of the Troops of the National Guard of the Russian Federation, “The Tasks and Functions of the Operational-Territorial Units of the Troops of the National Guard,” webpage, undated; Ol’ga Luk’yanova, “K gubernatoram pristavayat okhranu,” *Kommersant*, November 7, 2017.

- Maintain readiness for peacetime and mobilization tasks
- Protect public order and security
- Protect important government facilities and other objects
- Perform counterterrorism and counterextremism tasks
- Ensure martial law during a state of emergency
- Defend Russian Federation territory
- Assist the FSB Border Guards
- Assist in repelling aggression against the Russian Federation in conjunction with the Armed Forces
- Counter arms trafficking
- Provide security for governors or other regional authorities, if needed
- Provide civil defense.

### ***Command Relationships for Crisis Response***

Russia is revising its command relationships among military forces, internal security troops, and federal agencies to improve crisis response to an integrated threat. The military received authorities to coordinate with federal executive bodies for defense purposes as part of the amendments to the *National Defense Plan* in 2013. One year later, the National Defense Control Center (NDCC) was created to serve as a national command and control hub for responding to both internal and external threats; it shares information and intelligence among over 40 federal agencies.

The Russian government has made other command adjustments at the regional and municipal levels to improve coordination between internal and external security forces. In 2015, Military District Commands were authorized to split into two entities in wartime, both subordinate to the military: One half, the Operational Strategic Command, will command military forces, while the other half, the Wartime Military District, will command regional civilian authorities and other nonmilitary assets under martial law.<sup>19</sup> Revisions to the federal law *On*

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<sup>19</sup> Aleksey Ramm, "Gubernatorov, FSB i politsiyu v sluchae voyny podchinyat voennym," *Izvestiya*, October 11, 2016. The Wartime Military District ensures martial law, territorial defense, and mobilization, and coordinates local government and industry activity. Other

*Martial Law* have also expanded the military's internal defense mission: If internal troops are overwhelmed or lack a needed capability, the military is authorized to protect public order and to ensure civil and territorial defense.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, military commanders at the Military District level can assume command of internal security forces and order them to assist with external defense tasks, such as mobilization.<sup>21</sup>

In 2017, the Kremlin granted legal authority for Russian internal security forces (the National Guard) to be used abroad in support of the military.<sup>22</sup> There is some precedent for this relationship, dating from the Soviet era: Soviet internal security forces participated in counter-partisan and rear-security operations for the Red Army in World War II and supported operations in Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> National Guard combat activities abroad would occur only in an extreme circumstance, because that mission is not the National Guard's primary (or even secondary) role, and deploying the National Guard abroad could leave the Russian homeland vulnerable during a serious crisis. However, in such a circumstance, the National Guard's capabilities could serve as a supporting force multiplier for advancing military units and could be used specifically for crowd suppression or urban area cordon operations. Some Western analysts suggest that the National Guard can provide up to two armored divisions and nine brigades of personnel and light equipment to the Western (European) theater of operations.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, National Guard units could support security operations in Central Asia, given the crowd control, counterterrorism,

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wartime missions for military districts (MDs) include military training for the entire population, commanding part of the National Guard, or halting *agitprop*.

<sup>20</sup> Ramm, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> President of Russia, *Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniya ob operativno-territorial'nom ob"edinenii voisk natsional'noi gardii Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 04.06.2018 g. N 289*, 2018a.

<sup>22</sup> President of Russia, 2018a.

<sup>23</sup> Harriet Fast Scott and William Fontaine Scott, *The Armed Forces of the USSR*, 2nd ed., Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981.

<sup>24</sup> Persson, 2016, p. 71.

and border-security capabilities of the National Guard's subordinate agencies.<sup>25</sup>

In 2017, Russia clarified the legal relationship between the newly established National Guard and the Ministry of Defense. The National Guard—like its primary predecessor force, the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)—can assume command of military units for mission support during national emergencies; therefore, this legal revision is not a change in practice, but rather a change to reflect the new organizations' names.<sup>26</sup>

### **Training**

To be consistent with Russia's stated grand strategy, we would expect the training of military and National Guard forces to become increasingly integrated over time. We do not yet find evidence of this integration beyond token internal security forces participation in Russia's largest military exercises, but that could be because the National Guard is a relatively new entity. Typically, internal security forces conduct small training events for counterterrorism, riot control, and border-guard missions, and these events are not usually integrated with Ministry of Defense exercises.<sup>27</sup> Russian military exercises from 2012 to 2017 have increasingly emphasized the integration of military and civilian *agencies* but not necessarily the integration of military and internal security *forces*.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2017*, Vol. 117, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 186.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Is the Russian National Guard Suddenly Acquiring Sweeping New Powers? No, Not So Much," blog post, *In Moscow's Shadows*, June 6, 2017b. Moscow has used military force against Russian citizens (two conflicts in Chechnya in the 1990s) and, in the 21st century, has used such force to supplement ongoing counterterrorism operations in the North Caucasus.

<sup>27</sup> One recent exception to this rule is 2015's large Zaslav exercise, in which 40,000 internal security personnel participated across Russia. Johan Norberg of the Swedish Defence Research Agency observes that since 2011, Ministry of Defense exercises have grown larger and more complex and are incorporating civilian assets and local authorities (Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight: Russia's Major Military Exercises 2011–2014*, Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI-R--4128--SE, December 2015; "Vnutrennie voiska MVD RF proveli ucheniya v usloviyakh, skhozhikh s Maidanom," RIA Novosti, April 9, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Monaghan, 2017, pp. 74–75; President of Russia, 2018a; "New Wartime State Management System Gives Full Power to Russian Military—Report," *RT*, October 11, 2016; "Boi bez

## Conclusions

Russian behavior suggests that Moscow has deemed it necessary to maintain a capable military *and* internal security force—and, furthermore, work toward improving the capability of these two groups to coordinate and support one another against an integrated threat. Russia's actions to establish legal and command relationships between its military and internal security forces and to improve interagency coordination suggest that Moscow wants to be prepared to respond using all of the arms of the state. New structural enhancements, particularly the consolidation of internal forces into the National Guard and the formation of the NDCC, will allow Russia to fund and control forces at its disposal far more efficiently than in the past. Russia is pursuing a balanced approach, prioritizing both its military and internal security forces. We therefore conclude that Russia's actions are consistent with the element of its stated strategy that external and internal threats are integrated, and that the country's response should be flexible and integrated.

The lack of joint training between military forces and internal security forces is an apparent inconsistency with stated strategy, though this might change as the National Guard matures.

If Russia's stated strategy and actions to date are accurate guideposts, we would expect to see deepening coordination between the military forces and internal forces over time, which could manifest itself in more joint exercises or joint task forces.

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upravleniia—nemyslim," *Voennyi vestnik Yuga Rossii*, October 17, 2016. In 2016, Russian forces conducted a massive national civil defense drill involving 200,000 personnel (and the notional involvement of millions). The military was said to have rehearsed the control of regional municipal and civilian organizations, the National Guard, and other civilian agencies in the city of Stavropol and the regions of Ingushetia and Crimea. Results were mixed and reportedly prompted additional legislative and planning revisions.



## Strategy Element: Russia as Regional Leader

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### Stated Strategy

Russia's stated strategy prioritizes post-Soviet Eurasia over all other regions. Russia's declared objectives toward the "neighborhood" seem quite benign: "Russia builds friendly relations with each CIS member state based on equality, mutual benefit, respect and taking into account each other's interests."<sup>1</sup> Yet there are some clear qualifiers: "While respecting the right of its partners within the CIS to establish relations with other international actors, Russia expects the CIS member States to fully implement their obligations within integration structures that include Russia."<sup>2</sup> The slightly paternalistic—or even threatening—tone comes through quite clearly.

The decree governing Russian policy toward the CIS stipulates the sweeping nature of the principle tasks of Russia in its relations with these countries: "Maintaining reliable stability in all its meanings: political, military, economic, humanitarian, and legal." In other words, Russia will play the role of regional security provider and guarantor of this broad concept of stability. The decree also says that Russia will "assist the formation of the CIS states as politically and economically viable states that conduct friendly (*druzhestvennyi*) policies toward Russia."<sup>3</sup> It is striking that Russian officials often use the

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<sup>1</sup> President of Russia, 2016b.

<sup>2</sup> President of Russia, 2016b.

<sup>3</sup> President of Russia, *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii 'Ob utverzhdenii Strategicheskogo kursa Rossiiskoi Federatsii s gosudarstvami — uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimyykh Gosu-*

term “friendly” to describe the behavior that Russia expects from its neighbors.<sup>4</sup> This concept of “friendliness” is never defined precisely, but it clearly implies some degree of political and economic loyalty and support for Moscow’s policies.

Notwithstanding the expectations of hierarchical superiority betrayed in these statements, Russia portrays itself, on the whole, as a benign regional leader focused on consolidating the various regional integration efforts that it leads. The objective of this chapter is to assess the extent to which Russia’s actions reflect these measured declarations.

## Evaluation Method

To assess Russia’s objectives vis-à-vis its immediate neighbors, we devised two complementary frameworks of possible relationships between regional hegemons and their smaller neighbors. One framework represents a spectrum of regional integration outcomes that Russia might be willing to accept—or reject—along its periphery. These regional integration outcomes pertain to economic, security, and political relationships between regional hegemons and their smaller neighbors. The other framework represents a spectrum of potential military approaches that a hegemon, such as Russia, might pursue within its region.

We derive the first framework (regarding regional integration outcomes) from David Lake’s work on the concept of hierarchy to conceptualize the extent of one state’s authority or control over another state.<sup>5</sup> Relationships between the states can vary by the extent of hierarchy between them. At one extreme, sovereign territorial states interact with equal authority. At the other extreme, one state has essentially “no independent rights or autonomous ability to decide anything and is

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*darstv.*’ No. 940, September 14, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> The term is used in both the Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine to describe relations with neighbors.

<sup>5</sup> David Lake, “Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Winter 1996, p. 8. See also Naseemullah Adnan and Paul Staniland, “Indirect Rule and Varieties of Governance,” *Governance*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 2016.



subservient to [the other state] in all aspects”; territorial annexation and colonization are examples of this extreme.<sup>6</sup> Few bilateral relationships resemble either extreme; with rare exceptions, they fall somewhere in between on Lake’s scale. Lake plots the hierarchical relationships across two dimensions: security and economic policies.

Across the security axis, the lowest level of hierarchy is characterized by diplomatic exchanges between equals. The medium level of hierarchy is a sphere of influence, in which “a dominant state possesses the authority only to limit a subordinate’s cooperation with third parties. In such spheres, the subordinate need not cooperate actively with its dominant state, but it is prohibited from entering into alliances or other interactions with others.” In a protectorate relationship, the highest level of hierarchy, the dominant state controls the weaker state’s foreign policy.<sup>7</sup>

In economic relations, the least hierarchical relations are based on market exchanges: States engage in economic interaction but cede no control over economic policymaking to one another. The opposite end of the spectrum is a dependency, whereby one state cedes authority over all of its economic policies to another. Weak dependencies involve giving up some degree of control over economic policy, for example, when a state pegs its currency to another state’s currency.

Although empires exert the most hierarchical control over their peripheries, even they vary in their extent of control. A formal empire oversees states with high levels of control and authority, often legally enshrined, as in the cases of the British empire and other European colonial powers. An informal empire does not necessarily have a legal structure subordinating other states, but that relationship is subordinate in practice. In both cases, the states are kept together through coercion by the stronger state and dependence of the weaker states. The

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<sup>6</sup> David Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Lake, 1996, p. 8; David Lake, “The New American Empire?” *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 3, August 2008.

Soviet relationship with the members of the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War is an example of an informal empire.<sup>8</sup>

As Lake notes, states involved in an asymmetrical hierarchical relationship are in a constant process of negotiation of the terms of their relationship:

Dominant and subordinate states constantly struggle, at least at the margins, to define the scope of their rights and duties. In this process, subordinates push at the limits of their obligations to see what they can “get away with” while retaining the benefits of the political order provided by the dominant state. In return, dominant states use discipline to demarcate the limits of their tolerance.<sup>9</sup>

Following Lake’s logic, we posit various outcomes of regional integration that Russia might accept without resorting to “discipline”—i.e., coercion. *Coercion* refers to efforts to change another state’s behavior “based on the power to hurt,” as Thomas Schelling writes. “The pain and suffering” imposed “have to appear *contingent* on [the other state’s] behavior.” In other words, “coercion requires finding a bargain, arranging for him to be better off doing what we want—worse off not doing what we want—when he takes the threatened penalty into account.”<sup>10</sup> Regional hegemons, as Lake notes, use coercion to establish red lines regarding neighbors’ behavior or to punish neighboring states when they cross those red lines. Therefore, episodes of coercion reveal a dominant regional state’s bottom-line objectives. Table 5.1 categorizes the different acceptable outcomes for four alternative models of hierarchical relationships between Russia and its neighbors. In addition to the security and economic dimensions that Lake includes in his

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<sup>8</sup> Lake, 1996, pp. 8–9; Lake, 2008, p. 284; Hendrik Spruyt, “‘American Empire’ as an Analytic Question or a Rhetorical Move?” *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 3, August 2008, pp. 293, 297; Jan Zielonka, “Empires and the Modern International System,” *Geopolitics*, Vol. 17, No. 3, July 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Lake, 2009, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 5.

**Table 5.1**  
**Integration Outcomes Russia Might Accept Without Resorting to Coercion**  
**Under Four Models of Hierarchical Relationships**

Relationship Model	Laissez-Faire	Arm's Length	Interventionist	Imperialist
Security	Membership in alternative security block (e.g., NATO)	Nonaligned	Russian ally	Russian control of foreign policy
Economics	Membership in alternative economic bloc (e.g., DCFTA with the EU)	Neither a member of EAEU nor a signatory of DCFTA	Membership in EAEU	Ruble zone; economic policies set by Moscow
Leadership attitudes	Leaders are hostile toward Russia	Leaders are neutral toward Russia, at least not hostile	Russia-friendly leader in power	Direct Russian control or control by Russian proxies

NOTE: DCFTA = Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement.

concept of interstate hierarchy, we add a third dimension of “leadership attitudes” to represent a spectrum of domestic political stances that smaller neighbors might adopt toward the regional hegemon. For each model, these dimensions represent outcomes that would not result in hegemonic coercion and, thus, would be presumed to be acceptable to Moscow.

We characterize the lowest level of hierarchy as “laissez-faire” and the highest “imperialist.” Looking at Russia’s declared strategy, we would expect its actions and behaviors in the region to pursue the approach we characterize here as “interventionist.” Moscow itself, of course, does not use the term to refer to its regional policies; we use it because it suggests a degree of hierarchical involvement in neighboring countries’ affairs and in regional integration leadership but not total control or territorial conquest—the former of which is—if one reads between the lines—conveyed in the strategic documents. We would expect, therefore, that Russia would use coercive methods to achieve outcomes consistent with the interventionist model.

Many Western analysts claim that Russia's strategy in the region is, in fact, imperialist.<sup>11</sup> A state with imperialist objectives would aim for a high level of control over decisionmaking in a target country. In the case of Russia, imperialism would entail an attempt to recreate a degree of dominance resembling, for example, the level of control that the Soviet Union exercised over its Eastern European satellites. It would also entail resorts to coercion if Russia did not achieve such imperialist objectives. To test the claims of Russia's stated strategy, therefore, we first analyzed Russia's recent responses to different outcomes of its sprawling regional integration efforts. Coercive responses to certain negative outcomes imply that those outcomes are unacceptable. Coercion employed to push a regional state to accept a particular outcome would suggest a goal of bringing that outcome to pass. Table 5.1 thus gives us a baseline for assessing with what relationship model Russia's actions—versus its words—are consistent.

For the second framework, we analyzed Russia's military posture in and toward the region—in other words, Russia's preparation for potential military intervention. Depending on the level of control a state seeks to exert over its periphery, it could develop differing force postures, capabilities, and doctrines—ranging from light border protection and no plausible capabilities for long-term territorial control to robust deployments on neighbors' territories and equipping the military for an occupation role. The role of a state's military bases in neighboring countries would differ as well. Regional powers with no hierarchical ambitions would either not establish bases in neighboring countries or do so only for transit purposes. For states determined to establish a highly hierarchical relationship, bases in the peripheral states could serve dual purposes, with the ability to intervene in the domestic politics of the weaker state, if necessary. We posited military approaches using different hierarchical approaches, as seen in Table 5.2.

Based on Russia's declared strategy, we would again expect its resource decisions and behaviors to match the approach we characterize here as "interventionist," even though Moscow does not use that

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016.

term. As noted previously, Russia's stated strategy describes its presence in the former Soviet republics as a force for stability. Moscow's military reform, in fact, has been built around establishing a regional rapid-reaction capability and providing Russia with predominant capabilities vis-à-vis its neighbors. Table 5.2 establishes a baseline for evaluating Russia's military approaches in the region to test whether its actions match its grand strategic declarations.

## Regional Integration Outcomes That Russia Accepts or Rejects

To analyze Russia's recent responses to different integration outcomes, we begin this section by assessing the current status of regional integration efforts. The section then surveys which of the integration outcomes have prompted Russia to use coercion in the neighboring states

**Table 5.2**  
**Military Approaches to Neighbors Under Four Models of Hierarchical Relationships**

Dimension	Laissez-Faire	Arm's Length	Interventionist	Imperialist
Military posture	Light border protection	Regional predominance without border concentration	Rapidly deployable forces with concentrations near borders	Deployments on neighbors' territory for purposes of coercion and control, possibly without host-nation consent
Capabilities and training	No ability to establish or sustain occupation	Conventional predominance without long-term occupation capability or training	Conventional predominance with capabilities to intervene rapidly and, if necessary, occupy	Conventional predominance with capability and training for long-term occupation
Role of regional bases	None, or refueling only (i.e., transit)	Installations play purely security cooperation and power-projection functions	Bases carry out certain security functions on behalf of the host government	Bases carry out a variety of sovereign functions of the host state

and which have not. Finally, the section describes contrasting Russian approaches to the domestic politics and leadership attitudes of states within the region.

### **Status of Regional Integration Efforts**

Since the early 1990s, Moscow has clearly articulated that advancing regional security and economic integration in post-Soviet Eurasia is a top policy priority. To achieve this goal, Russia relies on an extensive range of bilateral arrangements and close informal ties with leaders in post-Soviet Eurasia and an array of multilateral groupings. These include the CIS, the EAEU, the SCO, and the CSTO. Each of these initiatives aims to coordinate international action around key issue areas and entails a different degree of supranational authority over national decisionmaking. Table 5.3 outlines each post-Soviet Eurasian state's participation in these organizations and the nature of Russia's military presence on the other state's territory.

The CIS is the oldest multilateral organization in the region and was created in the context of the Soviet collapse. Including Russia, 12 of the 15 former-Soviet republics joined the CIS by 1993.<sup>12</sup> Georgia departed from the CIS after its 2008 war with Russia; Ukraine has threatened to exit since 2014 but has yet to follow through.

The SCO was created in June 2001 with an initial mandate to promote regional security and to protect the signatory countries from the threat of terrorism.<sup>13</sup> In time, the SCO broadened its scope to include "cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, technology and culture . . . education, energy transport, tourism, environmental pro-

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<sup>12</sup> Formally, Ukraine never ratified its membership in the CIS, but behaved as a *de facto* member until 2014. The CIS maintains an executive secretariat in Minsk, an interparliamentary assembly, and 12 coordinating councils (for heads of state, heads of government, and ministers). It also has around 50 specialized bodies, dedicated to everything from patents to meteorology, civil aviation, and plant breeding (John P. Willerton and Mikhail A. Beznosov, "Russia's Pursuit of Its Eurasian Security Interests: Weighing the CIS and Alternative Bilateral–Multilateral Arrangements," in Katlijn Malfliet, Lien Verpoest, and Evgeny Vinokurov, eds., *The CIS, the EU and Russia: The Challenges of Integration*, Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were the founding members of the SCO.

**Table 5.3**  
**Post-Soviet Eurasian States' Involvement in Russia-Led Initiatives and Russia's Regional Military Presence as of 2018**

Country	CIS	EAEU	SCO	CSTO	Russian Military Installations
Armenia	M	M	X	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 102nd Military Base in Gyumri</li> <li>• Erebuni Air Force base in Yerevan</li> <li>• Joint air-defense system</li> <li>• Joint Group of Forces</li> <li>• Russian Border Guards at several locations</li> </ul>
Azerbaijan	M	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
Belarus	M	M	Oa	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volga early-warning radar station</li> <li>• Vileika naval communications site</li> </ul>
Georgia	X	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7th joint military base in Abkhazia*</li> <li>• 4th military base in South Ossetia*</li> </ul>
Kazakhstan	M	M	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint air-defense system</li> <li>• Several military testing sites</li> <li>• Balkhash 9 communications site</li> <li>• Aerospace Forces (VKS) transport regiment in Kostanai</li> </ul>
Kyrgyzstan	M	M	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kant air base</li> <li>• Testing ranges</li> <li>• Naval communications site</li> </ul>
Moldova	M	Oa	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operative Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria*</li> </ul>
Tajikistan	M	X	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 201st military base</li> <li>• Okno space surveillance station</li> </ul>
Turkmenistan	M	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
Ukraine#	M	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range of bases and other facilities in Crimea*</li> </ul>
Uzbekistan	M	X	M	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>

NOTE: M = member; X = nonmember; Oa = nonmember with observer status; \* = facility is located in disputed territory and lacks the consent of the internationally recognized government; # = Ukraine stopped participating in CIS activities in 2014.

tection and other areas . . . and moving towards the establishment of a . . . new international political and economic order.”<sup>14</sup>

The CSTO, built on the basis of a collective security treaty, is essentially the umbrella for Russia’s security guarantees for its allies. It nominally controls its own rapid-reaction force, but that is a military detachment led and equipped by Russia, with minor inputs from other members of the CSTO.<sup>15</sup> This force has never been deployed.

In recent years, Moscow has concentrated its efforts on more-binding, more-limited-membership endeavors. Economically, it has focused on building up the EAEU, which began in 2010 as the Customs Union and was institutionally formalized in 2015. The EAEU, through the Eurasian Economic Commission, has policymaking authority over a variety of trade, regulatory, and other economic policies. Decisionmaking is conducted by consensus at the level of the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission, a body comprising deputy prime ministers from all member states with a rotating presidency. The original members were Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan; Armenia (2014) and Kyrgyzstan (2015) have since joined the bloc.

Judging by the degree of participation in Russia-led initiatives, the most-integrated states are Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan remains outside the EAEU, so it is somewhat less involved. These five are also the only countries in the region that have authorized a Russian military presence on their territories.

At the other extreme, Georgia is the least integrated, with Ukraine not far behind (it remains a nominal member of the CIS, as of this writing). Both have signed DCFTAs with the EU, and both have declared their intentions to join NATO. Signing a DCFTA makes membership in the EAEU impossible, because the former requires national control over trade policy and the latter entails relinquishing that control to a

<sup>14</sup> “The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,” webpage, January 9, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Russia contributes the 98th Airborne Division and the 31st Air Assault Brigade to the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (Roger McDermott, “Moscow Announces the Creation of Rapid Reaction Forces—Again,” Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 107, June 9, 2015).



supranational institution. Both countries also have Russian military troops and installations on their territories without their consent.

Moldova is somewhere in between, as a member of CIS and an observer in the EAEU while being a DCFTA signatory. Russia also maintains a military presence in the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan maintain their memberships in the CIS, but they do not host Russian military installations and are less interested in deepening their economic and security integration with Russia.

With respect to the “interventionist” relationship model noted in Table 5.1—allied neighbors that are integrated economically and are run by “friendly” governments—Russia has not been able to achieve these objectives with most countries in the region, as of mid-2018. Table 5.4 shows that most countries in the region are governed by elites that are not particularly “friendly” toward Russia. Even in the most compliant states, such as Belarus and Armenia, the attitude tends to be one of ambivalence rather than fulsome embrace.

### **Integration Outcomes That Have Prompted Russian Coercion**

Russia has been willing to use coercion to prevent regional integration outcomes in some of its neighboring states in the period under consideration.<sup>16</sup> We examine four major cases of coercion, as outlined in Table 5.5. We find that Russia’s orientation toward its neighbors varies significantly, and Moscow seems to lack a consistent bottom line in terms of the integration outcomes it will accept without resorting to coercion. Note that the “implied acceptable model of relations” in Table 5.5 pertains only to the first framework presented in Table 5.1, Russia’s regional integration efforts, not to the second, its regional military approaches, which will be discussed in the next section. This implied acceptable model should not be confused with Russian objectives or Russian behavior; instead, it represents the bottom line Moscow seems to accept without resorting to coercion.

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that significant coercive episodes occurred outside this time period, such as the 2008 war with Georgia.

**Table 5.4**  
**Russia's Relations with Countries in the Region, as of Mid-2018**

Country	Security	Economics	Leadership Attitudes Toward Russia
Armenia	Russian ally	EAEU member	Resigned dependence
Azerbaijan	Nonaligned, no significant cooperation with NATO or CSTO	Nonparticipant in any economic bloc	Ambivalent
Belarus	Russian ally	EAEU member	Mostly pro-Russian, wary of being absorbed
Georgia	NATO aspirant	DCFTA signatory, EU aspirant	Mostly hostile
Kazakhstan	Russian ally	EAEU member	Friendly, but seeking distance when possible
Kyrgyzstan	Russian ally	EAEU member	Mostly pro-Russian
Moldova	Constitutionally neutral	DCFTA signatory, EU aspirant	Some factions hostile, others pro-Russian
Tajikistan	Russian ally	Nonparticipant in any economic bloc	Largely pro-Russian
Turkmenistan	Neutrality recognized by UN General Assembly	Nonparticipant in any economic bloc	Ambivalent
Ukraine	NATO aspirant	DCFTA signatory, EU aspirant	Governing elite largely hostile
Uzbekistan	Nonaligned (left CSTO in 2012)	Nonparticipant in any economic bloc	Ambivalent

### ***Ukraine***

Although Moscow initially sought interventionist outcomes vis-à-vis Kyiv (i.e., Ukraine's membership in the EAEU), it resorted to coercion only to prevent a laissez-faire outcome (Ukraine signing the DCFTA). In 2012, Russia was pursuing interventionist objectives using relatively noncoercive means. Russia urged then-President Viktor Yanukovich to join the Customs Union, the predecessor to the EAEU, offering discounted gas prices and tariff benefits for key industries in return. Yanukovich, however, chose to pursue the DCFTA, finalizing the

**Table 5.5**  
**Major Incidents of Russian Coercion of Neighbors, 2012 to 2018**

Country	Russian Behavior	Implied Acceptable Model of Relations
Armenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coerced Yerevan into joining EAEU and not signing DCFTA</li> </ul>	Interventionist
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threatened retaliation for signing DCFTA</li> <li>Did not implement retaliatory steps after Tbilisi signed the agreement</li> </ul>	Laissez-faire
Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used sanctions to block signing of DCFTA</li> <li>After that attempt failed and Chisinau signed, sanctions were lifted</li> </ul>	Laissez-faire
Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used economic coercion to block DCFTA</li> <li>Invaded, annexed territory, supported separatism, imposed economic sanctions to block broader alignment with West</li> </ul>	Arm's length

NOTE: The implied acceptable model of relations does not refer to Russia's behavior. It is about minimum acceptable end-states.

negotiations in March 2012, with a signing ceremony planned for November 2013. His government initially attempted to pursue some level of integration with the Customs Union as well, becoming an observer in May 2013.

But Russia was unwilling to accept Ukraine joining the DCFTA regime. Clearly, Moscow would have preferred that Kyiv join the Customs Union (and eventually the EAEU), but by 2013, it was no longer issuing ultimatums to Ukraine to join immediately. Instead, it was attempting to forestall Kyiv's signing of the DCFTA, which would keep Ukraine forever on the outside of Russia-led regional integration efforts. By 2013, in other words, Russia was seeking an "arm's length" outcome of Ukraine being outside the DCFTA, but not in the EAEU. Ukraine, however, seemed determined to proceed with the EU agreement.

Having failed to persuade Ukraine, Russia imposed trade sanctions on the country in July 2013, first by cutting off imports of confectionary products, fruit, vegetables, and poultry. Russia then hit Ukrainian steel manufacturers and other exporters with cumbersome new customs procedures. For several days in August 2013, the Russian

authorities applied extensive customs checks to all Ukrainian imports, all but blocking them. Although normal trade resumed in less than a week, the message was clear: If Kyiv were to proceed with the DCFTA, Moscow would impose severe economic penalties.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, this shot across the bow shook Yanukovych, and he decided to not sign the DCFTA. Russia then granted his government a \$15-billion credit line, eased the restrictions on trade, and cut the price of Russia's natural gas exports by 30 percent. Having forgone full Ukrainian membership of the Customs Union in 2012, Russia by the end of 2013 was prepared to pay a high price just to block the EU agreement and keep the door open for potential EAEU integration in the future. However, violent street protests and attempts at a brutal crackdown by Yanukovych's government led to his ouster in February 2014.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, Russia suddenly found itself facing a staunchly pro-Western government that came to power because of, in no small part, a violent nationalist vanguard of the protest movement. The Kremlin's fear was that Ukraine would rapidly move toward NATO and EU membership and take steps to limit and eventually eject the existing Russian military presence in Crimea.

Russia's response was dramatic and swift. Because its economic coercion and economic incentives had failed to produce results, it resorted to military force. In late February 2014, special operators, paratroopers, and other "little green men" and materiel arrived in Crimea to bolster the forces stationed there as part of the Black Sea Fleet, while other Russian forces were deployed near the long land border between the two countries and began to conduct no-notice, large-scale

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<sup>17</sup> Specifically, Moscow threatened to end Ukraine's trade preferences under the CIS's free trade agreement, an effective increase in average tariffs of more than 10 percent. Such a move would have reduced Ukrainian exports to Russia by 17 percent per year, shaving off 1.7 percent of Ukraine's gross domestic product (GDP) annually (Mykola Ryzhenkov, Veronika Movchan, and Ricardo Giucci, *Impact Assessment of a Possible Change in Russia's Trade Regime Vis-a-Vis Ukraine*, Berlin, Germany and Kyiv, Ukraine: German Advisory Group in cooperation with the Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting Kyiv, PB/04/2013, November 2013).

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017.

exercises. Russian commandos, the insignias removed from their uniforms, fanned out across the Crimean Peninsula and began taking over Ukrainian military facilities and government buildings. On March 1, the upper house of Russia's parliament unanimously granted Putin the power to deploy Russian armed forces on the territory of Ukraine "until the normalization of the socio-political situation" there.<sup>19</sup> Following a deeply flawed referendum that was held under the watchful eye of Russian soldiers, Moscow annexed the peninsula.

In the wake of the Crimea annexation, the West and the new Ukrainian government effectively doubled down on the very policies that Moscow had been so keen to block: acceleration of Ukraine's integration with the EU and NATO. Russia thus seized on a wave of anti-government protests that were now breaking out across southern and eastern Ukraine. After local activists—many of them voicing separatist slogans—seized administrative buildings in Donetsk, Luhansk, and several smaller towns in the two eponymous oblasts, the Ukrainian government ordered a military operation to retake control. Russian civilian volunteers, along with special forces and military operatives, streamed across the border, adding fuel to the fire. Moscow upped the economic coercion by rescinding not only the gas discount accorded to Yanukovich in December 2013 but also an earlier price cut granted in 2010 and by demanding prepayment for the upcoming month's gas delivery.

Meanwhile, the border-area military exercises were transformed into a sustained buildup of an estimated 20,000- to 40,000-strong strike force. Russia could now invade its neighbor at a moment's notice. It also upped its assistance to the rebels, including more-sophisticated weapons, such as anti-aircraft systems. Several Ukrainian military jets were subsequently shot down, leading to the grounding of the Ukrainian air force.

At two decisive points in the fighting, Russia deployed large numbers of its own troops. First, when the separatists were on the verge of defeat in August 2014, regular Russian forces intervened with a coun-

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<sup>19</sup> "Russian Upper House Approves Use of Troops on Ukrainian Soil," Reuters, March 1, 2014.

teroffensive, delivering the Ukrainian military a stunning defeat in the town of Ilovaisk. Then, in January and February 2015, Russia intervened to push the Ukrainians back in a battle that culminated in the town of Debaltseve. In both cases, the offensives were linked to a coercive diplomatic strategy to force the Ukrainians to sign up to a set of Russian demands, particularly Ukraine's neutrality, undisturbed economic ties with Russia, and the "federalization" of Ukraine to grant its pro-Russian regions a veto over decisionmaking in Kyiv.<sup>20</sup> Although Moscow has failed to force Kyiv to implement its wishes, it has sustained the rebels militarily and financially, and periodic fighting persists despite multiple ceasefire agreements. Over 10,000 Ukrainians have died as of this writing. Although Ukraine is proceeding with ever-deeper integration with both NATO and the EU (the DCFTA was signed in 2014 and is being implemented), this simmering conflict effectively blocks membership in these institutions.

Russia also has imposed further economic sanctions on Ukraine. When the DCFTA went into effect in 2016, Russia, as per its earlier threats, ended the CIS trade preferences accorded to Ukraine. Moscow also placed an embargo on Ukrainian agricultural imports. Meanwhile, Russia has prioritized building North Stream 2, a pipeline that would allow it to route its gas supplies to the EU around Ukraine.

Moscow has demonstrated a willingness to use economic coercion and military force to stop Ukraine's alignment with the West. In the terms of the framework from Table 5.1, Russia used coercion to prevent a *laissez-faire* outcome but seemed prepared to accept an arm's-length result (i.e., nonparticipation in either Western- or Russia-led institutions), even though it had initially pursued interventionist goals (Ukraine's membership in the EAEU). Although this initial objective was consistent with Russia's stated interventionist strategy, Moscow resorted to coercion (harsh economic sanctions) only after it had failed to block Kyiv's signature of the DCFTA (a *laissez-faire* outcome). It used even greater coercion—invasion, territorial annexation, and sup-

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Zayavlenie MID Rossii o Gruppe podderzhki dlya Ukrainy," March 17, 2014.

port for an insurgency—when it seemed that Ukraine was set to move toward that *laissez-faire* outcome even more rapidly.

The Ukraine case demonstrates that Moscow did in fact seek an interventionist outcome, consistent with its stated strategy. However, it lacked the economic resources and political influence to achieve it without coercion. It used coercion only to prevent a *laissez-faire* outcome, suggesting that it seemed prepared to accept the middle-ground arms-length model. Moscow's approach thus seems more incoherent and reactive than determined and strategic. Furthermore, we do not see evidence of Russia's pursuing the imperialist model from Table 5.1.

### ***Moldova: Moscow Accepts Less Hierarchy***

In 2012, as Chisinau's negotiations with Brussels on a DCFTA accelerated, Russia sought to bring Moldova into the nascent Customs Union, consistent with its interventionist objectives. That effort produced precious few results, while Chisinau's talks with the EU rapidly accelerated to completion.

Russia employed an array of coercive measures, particularly economic sanctions, to derail the EU-Moldova DCFTA. In September 2013, two months before Chisinau planned to initial its DCFTA, Moldovan wine exports to Russia were banned on public-health grounds. Further sanitary restrictions were imposed in April and July 2014, and then Russia suspended tariff-free imports for 19 categories of goods in August.<sup>21</sup> Russia's economic bullying failed to affect Moldova's choice to proceed with the DCFTA, which it signed in June 2014. The latter rounds of sanctions were applied after the DCFTA was signed, perhaps to influence the outcome of the Moldovan parliamentary elections in November 2014.

In 2016, Moscow lifted the sanctions while Moldova continued to implement the DCFTA.<sup>22</sup> In short, the Moldovan case shows how a

<sup>21</sup> Denis Cenușă, Michael Emerson, Tamara Kovziridse, and Veronika Movchan, "Russia's Punitive Trade Policy Measures Towards Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia," CEPS Working Document, Vol. 400, September 2014, pp. 7–8.

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev and Mikhail Korostikov, "Vishenka na torge: RF soglasilas' s odnovremennym uchastiem Moldavii v rezhimakh svobodnoi trgovli ES i SNG," *Kommersant*, November 11, 2016.

failure to achieve an interventionist objective led to coercive economic policies. Once even those efforts did not produce the desired outcome, or even the “arms-length” objective of keeping Moldova economically neutral, Moscow stepped back from them. Although the Kremlin continues to support the pro-Russian faction in Moldovan politics, it seems to have reconciled itself to Chisinau’s increasingly deep economic ties with the EU, verging on a *laissez-faire* outcome. At least it does not seem to be taking actions to stop it, beyond Russia’s continued support for separatist Transnistria, which serves as a block on Moldovan membership in Western institutions.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Georgia: Lost for Good?***

In the case of Georgia’s DCFTA negotiations with the EU, Moscow’s leverage was limited; diplomatic ties had been cut in 2008 and Russia was no longer Georgia’s main trading partner when the DCFTA was being negotiated. Russia threatened to raise tariffs if Tbilisi proceeded with the DCFTA, but Russia never followed through. The threat failed to sway Tbilisi; it signed the DCFTA in June 2014. Moscow has refrained from taking coercive economic measures in the interim. In fact, as of 2017, it had become Georgia’s second-largest trading partner. Moscow’s approach, at least on economic integration, can be characterized as *laissez-faire*: Russia has not taken coercive actions to force Georgia out of the EU DCFTA and into its economic orbit, although, of course, it continues to occupy the two breakaway regions.

### ***Armenia: Interventionist Objectives Implemented***

Armenia engaged in negotiations for a DCFTA with the EU in parallel with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The negotiations were completed in July 2013, and the general expectation was that Armenia would sign the deal that November. However, in September 2013, then-President Serzh Sargsyan abruptly decided to abandon the negotiations with the EU and join the EAEU. He was widely reported to have been put under significant pressure from Moscow to do so.

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<sup>23</sup> Given the time frame (from 2012 through 2018) under consideration, we did not consider the ongoing Russian military presence in Transnistria.



Armenia's about-face reflected its deep dependence on Russia for both economic prosperity and security. Russian state firms own most of Armenia's utilities, while private Russia-based companies control other strategic sectors. Yerevan also depends on Russian security guarantees and military assistance in its conflict with Azerbaijan over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Although Armenia seems to have been coerced into joining the EAEU, it did sign a comprehensive partnership with the EU in 2017. The agreement covers a wide variety of areas, including political dialogue; foreign and security policy cooperation; justice, freedom, and security; trade; and sectoral cooperation.<sup>24</sup> Because the agreement did not contradict Yerevan's EAEU obligations, Moscow did not object.<sup>25</sup> With Armenia, Moscow did achieve its interventionist objectives, but it had to resort to coercive measures to do so.

### **Summary**

In all four cases discussed in this chapter, Moscow initially failed to achieve its interventionist objectives for regional integration. In all cases, it either applied or threatened to apply coercion to force its neighbors to change their policies, specifically to prevent "laissez-faire" outcomes (signing the DCFTA). In the cases of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, Moscow signaled that it would accept "arm's length" outcomes (neither DCFTA nor EAEU) and did not insist on interventionist ones. But coercion largely failed in those three cases; all have begun to implement their respective DCFTAs. In Ukraine, which is the most extreme case of (ongoing) coercion, Moscow has been unable to reverse Kyiv's economic (and security) integration into the West. With Moldova and Georgia, coercion (or the threat of coercion) also failed, but, unlike in Ukraine, Russia has seemed to back down, either reversing or not imposing sanctions for integrating with the EU on either state. In other words, it eventually accepted laissez-faire outcomes. With Arme-

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<sup>24</sup> Leila Alieva, Laure Delcour, and Hrant Kostanyan, *In-Depth Analysis: EU Relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan*, Brussels, Belgium: European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Affairs, October 2017.

<sup>25</sup> "MID: dogovor Armenii i ES ne protivorechit vzaimodeistviyu s Rossiei," RIA Novosti, October 23, 2015.

nia, coercion was a relative success, in that Moscow compelled Yerevan to abandon its DCFTA and join the EAEU, consistent with the interventionist strategy.

In these cases, Moscow resorted to coercion when it failed to achieve its interventionist objectives and foresaw the prospect of *laissez-faire* outcomes. But in the end, or at least at the moment, it has resigned itself to precisely those outcomes in two of these states (Georgia and Moldova) and continues to engage in coercion (thus far, fruitlessly) vis-à-vis a third (Ukraine). Ukraine does seem to be the exception to the rule in this respect.

This behavior suggests a degree of acceptance of a variety of hierarchical relationships with different neighbors. Moscow does not generally insist on its declared interventionist objectives, let alone imperialist ones. If anything, the evidence presented here suggests that Moscow's bottom line might be the neutral position implied by the arm's-length paradigm described in Table 5.1. That said, Russia is willing to resort to extreme coercion to prevent *laissez-faire* outcomes, particularly in Ukraine. On the whole, though, it seems that countries would not risk punishment if they were to pursue the arm's length approach, even if Russia might seek to entice them closer. Moscow might have objectives high on the hierarchical scale, but in most cases, it will not twist arms if outcomes are somewhat lower on that scale.

### **Outcomes That Have Not Prompted Russian Coercion**

The majority of the countries in the region were spared the treatment described in the previous section during the period under consideration. Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are all members of the EAEU and the CSTO—Russia's signature economic and security integration projects. Tajikistan is effectively in the same category, although it remains outside the EAEU. In other words, relations with these four states fall within the interventionist vision described in Moscow's stated strategy. Within the period under investigation, we do not observe cases of significant coercive actions toward these countries.<sup>26</sup> Russia has achieved its objective of keeping these countries within its

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<sup>26</sup> We exclude periodic trade disputes with Belarus and Kazakhstan.

preferred regional frameworks and generally avoided coercive actions in doing so. Although Moscow has, at times, sought greater levels of hierarchy—for example, by proposing construction of an air base in Belarus—generally, these states resist, and Russia tends to resort to bargaining rather than the blunt coercion described previously.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps it is unsurprising that compliant partners avoid coercive actions. After all, Moscow is getting what it says it wants. But in three other cases, Moscow accepts relations that are less hierarchical than its interventionist declared strategy. In the cases of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, Moscow has accepted arm's-length outcomes; Moscow does not insist on their membership in the EAEU and CSTO. It is worth noting that none of them pursue security integration with NATO or a DCFTA with the EU.<sup>28</sup> This model of relations seems to rest on the assumption that the states will not seek close partnerships with other outside powers. In return, Moscow seems mostly content to engage in commerce, maintain its influence, and counter regional security threats.

Russia's policy toward Azerbaijan exemplifies the limits of its ambitions in the region. Although Baku remains outside the CSTO and the EAEU, it is not closely integrated with NATO or the EU. That said, it has had a formalized partnership with NATO since 2005 and has been a member of the EU's Eastern Partnership program since 2009. Azerbaijan was one of the founders of the GUAM—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova—grouping, a body that was essentially intended to limit Russia's influence in the region. Although Russia-Azerbaijan relations have always been challenging because of the former's alliance with Armenia, they are arguably better today than they have ever been. Moscow seems content with Azerbaijan's geopolitical and geoeconomic neutrality; we observe no evidence of Russia pushing for Baku's membership in either the CSTO or the EAEU.

Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CSTO in 2012 represents an interesting case; Tashkent demonstrably quit a Russia-led integration

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<sup>27</sup> Denis Lavnikovich, "Russkie na podlete k Minsku," *Gazeta.ru*, September 3, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality was recognized in a 1995 UN General Assembly resolution and is enshrined in the country's constitution.

project while maintaining bilateral ties and did not face retribution.<sup>29</sup> (Tashkent left the bloc because of disagreements over Afghanistan policy and a desire to maintain foreign policy independence from Moscow.<sup>30</sup>) Although Russia's ties with Uzbekistan were relatively frosty under its long-time president Islam Karimov (who, as president, oversaw the country's relatively frosty relations with almost all countries), the two states maintained a bilateral "strategic partnership" despite the CSTO withdrawal. After Karimov died in 2017, the new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, reaffirmed his country's nonaligned status and lack of interest in joining the EAEU, even as he sought improved relations with Russia.<sup>31</sup> Moscow might prefer that Tashkent join its preferred regional organizations, but it is unwilling to take action to compel it to do so. One key difference between the Uzbekistan case and the Ukraine case is the lack of direct competition from other outside powers over the former's loyalty. In other words, there is no integration agenda between Uzbekistan and NATO or the EU. If there were, Tashkent's departure from the CSTO might not have been so smooth.

Russia's relatively noncoercive policies toward these seven states is striking given the variety of outcomes it appears to accept. We would expect no coercion vis-à-vis Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which participate in Russia-led integration projects. In the other three cases (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), Moscow has settled for what we characterize as arm's-length outcomes. In short, Russia's de facto approach to these states is scattershot. We do not see consistent interventionist objectives being pursued across these seven countries, and in none of the seven do we see pursuit of an imperialist agenda.

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<sup>29</sup> Uzbekistan has a history of ambivalence about the CSTO. It withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty in 1999, but then rejoined it and became a member of the CSTO in December 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Gennadii Sysoev, Elena Chernenko, and Maksim Yusin, "Uzbekistan otryvaetsya ot kollektivnoi," *Kommersant*, June 29, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> See Richard Weitz, *Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity Under New Leadership*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia–Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, January 2018.

### **Russian Approaches to Domestic Politics in Neighboring States**

As noted in Table 5.4, Moscow seems to have largely failed to achieve its goal of being surrounded by “friendly” governments. A close examination of Russia’s policies toward its neighbors reveals a variety of different approaches and, more importantly, different degrees of control sought over the domestic politics in these countries. In this section, we discuss Moscow’s actions in the unrecognized states of the region and its behavior toward the eleven recognized states formally under consideration. We do so because relations with the unrecognized states provide for a telling contrast. In comparison with the imperialist near-total control exerted over the unrecognized republics of South Ossetia, Donetsk, and Luhansk, Moscow has taken a relatively detached (*laissez-faire*) approach to the domestic politics of such countries as Georgia and Turkmenistan. Russia’s involvement in the other countries falls somewhere between these extremes.

Russia largely adopted an imperialist approach to the domestic politics of the breakaway republics of South Ossetia, Donetsk, and Luhansk. In the case of South Ossetia, Russia recognized it as an independent state in the aftermath of the Georgian war. However, despite the official emphasis on the “statehood” of South Ossetia, Russia directly controls the most important functions of the breakaway republic. For instance, Russian border troops guard the administrative boundary with Tbilisi-controlled territory, while Russian military forces stationed there constitute the main defense capability. The “Treaty on Alliance and Integration” between Russia and South Ossetia, signed in 2015, envisages the incorporation of the entity’s armed forces, security forces, and customs into those of the Russian Federation and includes economic provisions that further enhance Russia’s control over the domestic economy.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, senior Russian officers are appointed to key positions in the breakaway republics. For example, active-duty officers of the Russian military have occupied the position of “minister

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<sup>32</sup> President of Russia, “Dogovor mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Respublikoi Yuzhnaya Osetiya o soyuznichestve i integratsii,” webpage, March 18, 2015b.

of defense” in South Ossetia.<sup>33</sup> A similar degree of control has been established in the unrecognized republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.<sup>34</sup> Abkhazia seems to enjoy slightly greater independence in its domestic politics. For example, Moscow did not intervene in 2014 when Abkhazian protesters broke into the administration building in the regional capital and forced the “president” to resign over allegations of corruption. All four entities use the Russian ruble as their main currency.

With the internationally recognized states of the region, Russia exerts far less control. With its close allies of Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, Russia seems not to take measures to extend its control over domestic politics, in part because of their consolidated authoritarian regimes. Russia is, however, reported to be supportive of local pro-Russian groups in these countries and exerts influence through Russian-language media. In more-competitive political systems, Moscow has sought to influence election outcomes through cyberattacks (as in Ukraine in 2014) or direct financing of pro-Russian parties (as in Moldova). But the effective level of direct control is limited. This was on full display in May 2018 when a popular uprising led to a change of power in Armenia. According to press reports, Moscow took no action to stop what became known as the “velvet revolution.” In such countries as Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, Moscow’s influence on domestic political developments is indirect at most.

The contrast between the imperialist behavior in the unrecognized entities—i.e., the exercise of near-total control over governance and politics—and Moscow’s seemingly less grandiose ambitions regarding the domestic politics of the region’s states is striking. Although Moscow does intervene in domestic politics in certain cases, we did not observe its actions producing significant impact during the period under consideration. Moreover, in several cases, Russia seems to settle for less than its grand strategic ambitions of “friendly” regimes on its

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<sup>33</sup> Vasili Rukhadze, “Russia Underscores Its Military Presence in Georgia’s Breakaway Regions,” Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 10, No. 101, May 29, 2013; Denis Dmitriev and Grigorii Levchenko, “Ofitser GRU Oleg Ivannikov. On zhe ‘Orion’. On zhe ministr oborony Yuzhnoi Osetii Andrei Laptev,” *Meduza*, May 25, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Nikolaus von Twickel, “Russia and the ‘People’s Republics’ in Eastern Ukraine,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 214, February 28, 2018.

borders. As noted in Table 5.4, the leaders of most of these countries are at best ambivalent toward Russia. The limits of Russia's political influence and economic attractiveness make realization of its stated strategy a difficult proposition; in most of these cases, Moscow seems willing to settle for far less than "friendly" governments.

## **Russia's Military Approach to the Region**

In this section, we analyze Russia's military posture along its borders with its post-Soviet Eurasian neighbors (including its regional bases and military installations), the political role of those facilities, and Russia's military training and potential preparation for occupation missions.

### **Regional Military Posture and Basing**

We would expect Russia, consistent with its stated interventionist strategy, to develop a conventionally predominant military with capabilities to intervene rapidly in the region when called to do so. Its bases would be involved in furthering regional security objectives. If Russia were pursuing an imperialist strategy, we would see greater levels of control sought by Moscow, as per Table 5.2. In this section, we describe Russia's posture and bases in the region to assess the extent to which they match Moscow's declared interventionist aims.

### ***Caucasus Region***

Russia's Southern Military District (SMD) has responsibilities for the South Caucasus region, including the areas near the Georgian and Azerbaijani borders and the bases in Armenia. The SMD is home to the 58th Combined Arms Army (CAA), with a motorized rifle division and two motorized rifle brigades, and the 49th CAA, with three motorized rifle divisions. Each CAA also has support brigades for command and control, fire support, and logistics. The 58th CAA headquarters are located in Vladikavkaz, about 20 miles from the border with Georgia, most likely with the mission of supporting operations

against Islamic insurgents and deterring Georgia.<sup>35</sup> The 58th and 49th CAAs constitute the core of Russia's military assets that can be effectively deployed in the Caucasus.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the regular armed forces, the region is home to a large number of units from the FSB border troops and the National Guard. As of 2018, the region housed seven brigades and aviation units of the National Guard and an unknown number of FSB border troops.<sup>37</sup>

A bilateral agreement between Russia and Armenia allows Moscow to deploy FSB border troops in Armenia. There are three units of Russian border guards on the Armenian border with Turkey and one unit on the Armenian border with Iran. There are about 4,500 border troops total in Armenia, which is about the same number of Russian military troops in the country. About 82 percent of Russian contract personnel in Armenia are recruited from the local population.<sup>38</sup>

Russia operates two brigade-sized military bases in Georgia's breakaway regions—one each in Abkhazia (7th military base) and South Ossetia (4th military base)—and one brigade-sized base (102nd military base) and an air force outpost in Armenia. As a rule, Russian military bases are essentially enhanced brigades. The 102nd base is equipped with 74 T-72 tanks and over 180 armored personnel carriers.<sup>39</sup> The 7th and 4th bases have about 180 armored carriers and 40 tanks each.<sup>40</sup>

Overall, Russia's military posture toward and in the Caucasus allows it to maintain the status quo in the frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to quickly deploy its troops, if necessary, to the

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<sup>35</sup> Catherine Harris and Frederick Kagan, *Russia's Military Posture: Ground Forces Order of Battle*, Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, March 2018, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> I. Topchii, "Im dan prikaz—na zapad!" *Voennoe Obozrenie*, December 12, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Jakob Hedenskog, Erika Holmquist, and Johan Norberg, *Security in the Caucasus: Russian Policy and Military Posture*, Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI-R--4567-SE, 2018, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> K. Makienko, *Vozhidanii buri: yuzhnyi kavkaz*, Moscow: Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2018, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> IISS, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> IISS, 2018.



region's states. With respect to Georgia, Russia relies on large permanent deployments just across the border. It also has military bases in the breakaway regions of Georgia and in Armenia. These bases would likely be insufficient in the event of a large-scale war, but they can be reinforced rather quickly because of prepositioned equipment, while the bulk of the firepower would come from the forces stationed across the border. The combination of these forces gives Russia a variety of tools that it can use to maintain its security dominance in the region. Thus, in this region, Russia's behavior mostly fits the interventionist model, with some deviation in the context of Georgia's breakaway regions, where Moscow's deployments violate the country's sovereignty—at least according to nearly every country in the world except Russia.

### ***Ukraine***

The newly-minted 8th Guards CAA was created following the Ukraine crisis. This CAA features one motorized rifle division and one motorized rifle brigade, an air assault division, and two air assault brigades. In addition, the 8th CAA is forming a rocket brigade equipped with Iskander tactical ballistic missiles and is expected to be among the first to receive the new Armata tanks in 2020. The 8th CAA's headquarters are located in Novocherkassk, less than 35 miles away from the Ukrainian border. Following 2014, the headquarters of the 20th CAA were moved from Mulino (in the Nizhny Novgorod region) to Voronezh, much closer to the border, and reinforced with two new motorized rifle brigades (3rd and 144th) and a tank brigade, most likely to facilitate Russia's operations in Ukraine's Donbas region and to respond to any potential escalation.<sup>41</sup> The 3rd motorized rifle division has its headquarters in Boguchar, about 45 miles from the border with Ukraine. Two regiments of the 144th motorized rifle division are stationed in Klintsy, about 30 miles away from the border with Ukraine.

Russia deploys about 28,000 troops in annexed Crimea, including one reconnaissance brigade, two naval infantry brigades, one artillery brigade, and one nuclear/biological/chemical regiment. These units operate 40 modernized T-72s and over 400 armored personnel carri-

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<sup>41</sup> IISS, 2018, p. 172; Harris and Kagan, 2018.

ers. In addition, the VKS maintains one regiment of Su-24M/MR, SU-25SM, and Su-27 fighters, and one helicopter regiment. There are also two Naval Aviation fighter regiments with Su-24M/MR and Su-30SM aircraft, one helicopter regiment, and one fleet headquarters. Russia also reportedly deploys up to 3,000 troops in the rebel-held areas of Donetsk and Luhansk.<sup>42</sup>

The long-term installations on the border with Ukraine and the creation of the new CAA permanently positioned near the border suggest that Moscow will continue to rely on the use of force in its relationship with Kyiv over the long term. Generally speaking, this posture is consistent with the interventionist approach of maintaining regional dominance, again with the exception of the imperialist deployments in Crimea (although, according to Moscow, those deployments are on its own territory), Donetsk, and Luhansk.

### **Central Asia**

Russia's Central Military District (CMD) is responsible for contingencies in Central Asia. The main assets of the CMD are organized in two CAAs—the 2nd and the 41st—stationed along the border with Kazakhstan. The 2nd CAA controls three motorized rifle brigades, a rocket brigade equipped with Iskander-M missiles, an air-defense brigade, and an artillery brigade. The 41st CAA was bolstered by the creation of the 90th Guards Tank Division in 2016. The 41st CAA also controls three motorized-rifle brigades and the 201st military base, located in Tajikistan.

Russia operates military installations in the three Central Asian countries that are its allies—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Russia's presence in Tajikistan is, by far, the most extensive in the region. Russia's 201st military base is an important hedge against threats from Afghanistan and “a pillar of the regime of President Emomali Rahmon in the eyes of the Tajik ruling elite.”<sup>43</sup> The base hosts an estimated 5,000 personnel and 220 tanks and armored per-

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<sup>42</sup> IISS, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Arkady Dubnov, *Reflecting on a Quarter Century of Russia's Relations with Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018, p. 9.

sonnel carriers.<sup>44</sup> It is larger than Russia's other military bases because it was formerly a motorized rifle division during the Soviet period. The base could serve as a basis for scaling up operations quickly in case of increased threats emanating from Afghanistan or other regional crises. Russia also operates the 99th Air Base near Kant, Kyrgyzstan.

Generally, Moscow's posture in Central Asia is consistent with its declared interventionist strategy. The military bases perform security functions in the host countries and project power in the region. All bases operate with the consent of the host nations. Russia's forces along the borders are positioned to respond rapidly in the event of a crisis.

### **Belarus and Moldova**

As of this writing, Belarus hosts two Russian military installations: a Naval Communications Control Center in Vileyka and an early warning radar station in Baranovichi.<sup>45</sup> Russia has also stationed significant ground forces on the border with Belarus. In particular, the 144th Motorized Rifle Division of the 20th CAA, which was established in 2016, is stationed near the Belarussian border.<sup>46</sup> One of its regiments is stationed in Yelnya, about 60 miles away from the border.<sup>47</sup> Although Moscow has reportedly sought to expand its presence in Belarus, Minsk has successfully repelled these proposals.<sup>48</sup>

Russia deploys an estimated 1,500 troops in the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria.<sup>49</sup> These troops include two motorized rifle battalions, a command battalion, and 400 peacekeepers. A significant proportion of servicemen are recruited from the local population

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<sup>44</sup> IISS, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, *National Threat Assessment 2018*, Vilnius: Ministry of National Defence, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Aleksei Nikol'skii, "Zapadnuyu granitsu Rossii prikroyut tri novye divizii," *Vedomosti*, January 12, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Harris and Kagan, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> "Lukashenko: No Need for a Russian Air Base in Belarus," *Belarus News*, February 3, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> IISS, 2018.

and hold Russian passports.<sup>50</sup> Their presence in Transnistria allows Russia to sustain its influence in the country and maintain Transnistria's de facto separation from Moldova, thus effectively impeding Chisinau from pursuing membership in the EU and NATO.<sup>51</sup>

In these two states, we see divergent Russian behaviors. With Belarus, Moscow sticks to its interventionist stated strategy. In Moldova, by contrast, Russia's residual military presence can be deemed imperialist, as it operates without Chisinau's consent and largely remains in place to prevent Moldova's membership in Western institutions.

### **The Political Role of Russian Military Bases**

With the exception of the installations located in the conflict zones and unrecognized entities (e.g., Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia), we could not identify cases of Russia's regional military bases' being actively involved in shaping politics on the ground or defending local regimes. For example, the 102nd Russian base in Armenia serves important security purposes but does not appear to play a role in the country's politics. Since 1992, Russia has had the responsibility of protecting several of Armenia's borders, particularly with Turkey and Iran. However, this arrangement is by mutual consent and is supported by the Armenian government because it frees up resources for Armenia's primary security concern, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. These border deployments allow Russia to maintain some involvement in the domestic affairs of these countries, especially in a weak institutional environment plagued by corruption, in which security agencies tend to play an active (though often covert) role in politics and the economy. In Tajikistan, the base serves as a symbol of Russian support for the ruling regime, but commanders play no observable public role in local politics. In the period under examination, we do not observe cases in which Russia's bases have served the function of imperial outpost vis-à-vis an internationally recognized government.

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<sup>50</sup> Farit Muhametshin, "Moldaviya vozmutilas' naborom v rossiiskuyu armiyu grazhdan RF iz Pridnestrov'ya," *Lenta.ru*, April 1, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Harris and Kagan, 2018, p. 12.

### Russia's Military Training

As noted in Table 5.2, if the Russian armed forces are meant to serve as an imperialist force, they should be trained and prepared to conquer and occupy neighboring territories. For example, the U.S. Army began preparing for occupation at least one year prior to the invasion of Sicily in 1943. These preparations included the creation of a Civil Affairs Division within the War Department and an extensive recruiting and specialized training program with the stated goal of training between 5,500 and 6,000 officers to assume governing responsibilities. The U.S. Army also created the School of Military Government at the University of Virginia as early as 1942. In addition, G-5 staff sections (civil affairs and military government) were added to the theater army, corps, and even division levels. The type of training that signals preparation for occupation has evolved over time. In more-recent years, the U.S. Army developed a counterinsurgency doctrine after it was confronted with the challenges of protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and needed to start placing more emphasis on assisting governance reform.<sup>52</sup>

If Russia were planning to use military force to occupy neighboring countries, we would likely see some signs of preparation and doctrinal development for war termination, occupation, and civil-military administration or nation-building. Our analysis of Russia's annual strategic exercises since 2012 indicates that the size of an average exercise, in terms of personnel and equipment, increased significantly after 2014. Conducting larger exercises signals an improved ability to plan and execute large-scale land operations, with the participation of hundreds of thousands of personnel and tens of thousands of pieces of equipment. In addition, several exercise scenarios emphasized nationwide readiness for a large-scale interstate conflict. Along with the military, these exercises featured the participation of the National Guard and other paramilitary units and major civilian agencies, such as the Ministry of Transport, the Federal Air Transport Agency, Russian Railways, and regional governments. Large-scale participation of

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<sup>52</sup> Harry Lewis Coles and Albert Katz Weinberg, *Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1964, pp. 63–84.

paramilitary units highlights their role in territorial defense and “their potential as an occupying force following advancing regular forces.”<sup>53</sup> However, we do not see the same kind of attention in Russian training, doctrine, or preparation for wartime governance (occupation) or post-conflict nation-building beyond Russia’s borders. In short, Russia’s recent exercises do not suggest that it is preparing for long-term occupation of neighboring countries.

When Russia did invade a neighboring state (Ukraine) in the period under investigation, the military quickly handed governance functions over to local civilian proxies. In Crimea, nearly the entirety of the local police force defected to the Russian side and fulfilled law-and-order functions there. In the Donbas, Moscow has relied heavily on residents of the region to lead the separatist regimes and particularly to form the rank and file of the rebels’ military forces, even though those forces are reportedly trained and often led by uniformed Russian military officers.<sup>54</sup> In neither case did the Russian military seek to play the role of occupying force and perform the functions of government.

## Conclusions

This examination of Russia’s behavior toward its neighbors provides important insights into its grand strategy claims regarding the region it says is most important to its national security. The first section demonstrated that Russia has resorted to coercion largely in attempts to block outcomes inconsistent with its goals of regional integration. However, in several cases, that coercion failed, and Moscow seems to have reconciled itself to laissez-faire outcomes, which are significantly less than Russia’s stated strategic objectives.

Ukraine, of course, is a major exception, where Moscow has not only resorted to far more coercive actions than in other cases but also has not accepted failing to get what it wants. But even with Ukraine,

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<sup>53</sup> Norberg, 2015, p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Yaroslav Krechko and Yevhen Holovin, “Holovni dokazy uchasti Rosiyi u vijni na Donbasi za 2017 rik,” *Radio Svoboda*, January 8, 2017.

Moscow has signaled that it would be willing to settle for less than its stated strategy of pursuing the interventionist model of having Kyiv fully inside its institutional camp—specifically, some sort of neutrality. Although it is possible that Russia has merely adapted its tactics and is biding its time, its actions as of mid-2018 suggest that its objectives are in fact consistent with the “arm’s length” model described previously.

The cases of noncoercion demonstrate Russian acceptance of a variety of hierarchical relationships with its neighbors. Compliant states are spared coercion, but so are ones that seek distance from Moscow, such as Azerbaijan. In all of these cases, defection to the West was never on the table. That prospect seems to be the major driver of overt coercive action. A relatively detached approach can be seen in Russian interference in the region’s domestic politics as well; Moscow certainly meddles in the politics of the neighboring states, but it does not seek to impose its will as it does in the unrecognized republics.

Russia’s military posture, training, and basing also paint a mixed picture. The Russian military does have significant deployments along the borders of post-Soviet Eurasian states, consistent with its interventionist strategy. And it does train for rapid response and regional conflicts. Its bases carry out important security functions in several regional states. Furthermore, it does not appear to train for occupation, and its bases (outside the unrecognized republics) do not play a role in the politics of their host countries. These behaviors are all consistent with Russia’s stated interventionist strategy. That said, Moscow does maintain uninvited troop deployments in three of the eleven states—Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova—and, in those cases, its officers do control elements of governance. These behaviors are consistent with an imperialist strategy.

On the whole, though, we see little evidence of a comprehensive regional strategy of imperial domination. Generally speaking, Moscow’s actions seem aimed at achieving its stated interventionist objectives. Often, however, it has failed to achieve these objectives, and, when it does fail, it has modified its objectives and accepted lower levels of hierarchy in its relations with neighbors. The overall picture is one of inconsistency or even incoherence rather than pursuit of a master plan.





## Strategy Element: Focus on Non-Contact Warfare

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### Stated Strategy

Russia's military doctrine states explicitly that armed conflict with a peer opponent is unlikely to take the form of a protracted, large-scale land war. This is likely based on observations of modern conflicts and an understanding of the force development of Russia's rivals. Both the 2014 Military Doctrine and 2016 Foreign Policy Concept conclude that large-scale war against the Russian Federation is unlikely, yet the risk is growing from smaller conflicts (or local wars, in doctrinal terms) that can rapidly escalate.<sup>1</sup> Then—Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Makarov said in 2009 that “the probability of the outbreak of large-scale war that involves Russia is minimal.”<sup>2</sup> As his successor, Valery Gerasimov, observed in 2013, “frontal clashes of large force groupings at the strategic and operational levels is gradually becoming a thing of the past.”<sup>3</sup>

According to Russian military strategy, armed conflict with an advanced opponent will likely take the form of a non-contact war. In *non-contact warfare*, a large standing military and its associated mobi-

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<sup>1</sup> President of Russia, 2016b; Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2017. The Military Doctrine states plainly that although the “unleashing of a large-scale war against the Russian Federation becomes less probable, in a number of areas the military risks encountered by the Russian Federation are increasing,” emphasizing that border conflicts could escalate quickly (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Makarov, “Regional and Global Threat Assessment; Nature of Future War; Future Force Structure of the Russian Armed Forces,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 1, No. 26, 2009a. See also Makarov, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Gerasimov, 2013a.

lization system become less important than rapid-reaction capabilities, modern air and aerospace forces, and advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) for battlespace awareness.<sup>4</sup> Senior Russian military officials contend that the center of gravity of modern conflict is shifting to the aerospace domain. Moreover, the decisive phase of war will occur in the opening days or weeks of conflict; states will not have weeks or months to mass forces at a border or to complete full mobilization once war has been declared. This kind of war will require “permanent readiness forces that are fully manned and equipped for war.”<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, Russia’s strategy documents state that Russia must be ready to rapidly respond to what is doctrinally defined as a *local war*: a conflict between states with limited political or military aims. According to Russia’s doctrine, the risk is growing from these smaller conflicts that can rapidly escalate.<sup>6</sup> A local war is often understood to occur along the border and to require rapid-reaction forces, ideally already stationed near the conflict area. For a local war, no large mobilization is required. Military equipment need not be highly sophisticated, just better than that of regional states’ militaries; light, mobile equipment and formations are best to rapidly respond to such a conflict.

Russia’s military doctrine defines four categories of warfare: armed conflict, local war, regional war, and large-scale war (see Table 6.1). Russian military strategy, at least according to its last official update

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<sup>4</sup> As Gerasimov wrote, “in the war of the future, the victor is not he who has the most modern tank, the fastest and most maneuverable aircraft or the most powerful missile, but he who can most effectively and comprehensively control the entire collection of land, air, sea, space, and information-based assets and not only those are forward deployed” (Gerasimov, 2013a). See also A. V. Bakhin, “The Organization of Command and Control of Troops (Forces) Within the New Military District,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 39, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Makarov, 2012. See also S. V. Surovkin, “Forms for Employing and Organizing Command and Control of a Joint Troop (Force) Grouping in the Theater of Military Activity,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 1, No. 46, 2014; Nikolai Makarov, “Vystuplenie nachalnika generalnogo shtaba vooruzhennykh sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 1, No. 27, 2009b.

<sup>6</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2017.

in 2014, deemed large-scale war as less likely than armed conflict and local war.

## Evaluation Method

This chapter asks whether Russia's force posture, readiness, and procurement decisions reflect stated strategy. Is Russia structuring and training its force in a way that is consistent with its doctrinal concepts about future conflict, which emphasize non-contact warfare and small-scale local wars? Can we infer any revealed preferences from Russia's resource decisions and actions? What do these actions reveal about the types of conflicts that Russia is preparing to address?

To evaluate Russian resource decisions and actions against the emphasis in strategic documents on non-contact warfare and local wars, we posited observable behaviors for two different approaches to preparing for warfare against a peer adversary: large-scale contact war, which is the type of warfare the documents claim is outdated, and the stated strategy's emphasis on non-contact war (see Table 6.2).<sup>7</sup>

Russia's military strategy envisions a variety of threats, from high-end peer competitors to regional instability on its borders in former Soviet states. If Russia's stated strategy and resource decisions were in alignment, we would expect Russia to pursue a force posture capable of both engaging in non-contact warfare with a peer and responding rapidly to small local wars against a less capable opponent. Preparations for such conflicts would likely manifest themselves with emphases on air power, conventional precision strike capabilities, modernization of space-based assets and C4ISR, and rapid-reaction capabilities. If stated military strategy is guiding resource decisions, we would not expect to see a return to a force designed for a large and protracted war, which would manifest as a large and active mobilization system, increase in

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<sup>7</sup> See, *inter alia*: V. V. Gerasimov, "General'nyi Shtab i oborona strany," *Voенно-Промышленный Кур'ер*, February 5, 2014a; V. V. Gerasimov, "Sovremennye voyny i aktual'nye voprosy oborony strany," *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 59, 2017a; Makarov, 2010; Makarov, 2009b; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014; Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2013.

**Table 6.1**  
**Levels of Warfare in Russia's Military Doctrine and Likely Observable Force Posture**

Level of Warfare	Scale	Characteristics	Russian Conflict Examples	Likely Observable Force Posture
Armed conflict	Limited conflict between two countries or internal conflict within the border of one country	Insurgency, civil war, interstate skirmish, border dispute	Russia's wars in Chechnya (1990s)	Light forces, rapid reaction, inactive mobilization, small-echelon training
Local war	Conflict conducted only within borders of warring countries and affecting only those countries	Limited political and military objectives	Russia-Georgia war (2008)	Mixed forces but mostly light, rapid-reaction, low-priority mobilization, single-MD training
Regional war	Conflict involving multiple nations in a region, between national or coalition militaries	Strategic military or political objectives	Russia and its allies' intervention in the Syrian civil war (2015)	Mixed forces but mostly heavy, partial mobilization readiness, multi-district exercises, large force size near threat
Large-scale war	Major war between coalitions of countries or between major global powers	Radical military or political objectives; full mobilization	World War II	Heavy forces, active mobilization base, exercises for large-echelon war, large force size

SOURCE: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014; authors' analysis.

**Table 6.2**  
**Postures Associated with Different Visions of Peer Competitor Conflict**

	Large-Scale Contact War	Non-Contact War
Posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Force size prioritized over modern equipment and readiness</li> <li>• Distinct first responders near conflict zone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modernized units</li> <li>• Dispersal locations for survivability</li> <li>• Small, mobile units</li> </ul>
Mobilization reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large and active strategic reserve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inactive or low activity</li> </ul>
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large force size</li> <li>• Mixed manning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on specialists and professional soldiers</li> </ul>
Procurement priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy armor</li> <li>• Large quantities</li> <li>• Army equipment prioritized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precision strike, Air Force, Space, and Navy equipment prioritized</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large-echelon exercises, combined formations, peer competitor scenarios</li> <li>• Mobilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aerospace dominant</li> <li>• Naval strike drills</li> <li>• Dispersal</li> <li>• Rapid reaction</li> </ul>

the number of military units, or large-echelon (theater or front level) combined-arms warfare training (as seen in Table 6.2).

To test Russia's resource decisions and behaviors, we considered changes over time to Russia's force posture, procurement patterns, military mobilization system, and training.<sup>8</sup> We found markedly different levels of consistency with Russia's stated grand strategy across two different time periods: pre-2014 versus post-2014.

<sup>8</sup> An important caveat should be included when interpreting Russian procurement decisions. Procurement programs can be affected by many internal factors (preserving defense industries, slow research and development progress, inefficiencies in the system) and external factors (sanctions, the inability to acquire essential components), and these can at times outweigh strategy considerations. As Richard Connolly and Mathieu Boulègue note, recent Russian history has shown that internal politics, geopolitical events, shifts in international relations, and defense industry problems can all influence how Russia chooses to allocate its procurement resources (Richard Connolly and Mathieu Boulègue, *Russia's New State Armament Programme*, London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2018).

## Posture Revisions Initially Consistent with Stated Strategy Until 2014

Russian implementation of strategy can be divided into two distinct periods: from the start of the “New Look” reforms from 2008 through 2014, when Russia attempted to align its force structure to an emphasis on non-contact and local war, consistent with stated strategy; and 2014 to 2018, when Russian behaviors and resource decisions no longer seemed consistent with that concept.

As of 2012, the beginning of the period under examination in this report, the Russian military was roughly four years into the comprehensive New Look defense reform program. These reforms, announced after Russia’s disappointing combat performance in the August 2008 war with Georgia, aimed to streamline the force, modernize it with new or refurbished equipment and highly trained personnel, and emphasize precision-guided munitions and advanced technologies by 2020.<sup>9</sup>

At the start of the reform process, Russia’s military was still tethered in many respects to a Soviet-style force posture, organized (on paper) to fight the large-scale wars of the past. Russia’s military had a low percentage of modern military equipment, a high percentage of conscripts, and a large mobilization base with low readiness (i.e., cadre-strength units) that would be activated during general mobilization. Makarov predicted that it would be a struggle to modernize 30 percent of the force by 2012, even with severe force reductions.<sup>10</sup> According to his assessments, no more than 17 percent of the Ground Forces units were considered “permanently ready” (Russia’s highest readiness category), and the mobilization base was so dilapidated that fewer than ten divisions could be mobilized from the reserves. Only five of 150 Air Force regiments were permanently ready; and even among those units, equipment serviceability rates were around 65 percent, well below requirements. The Navy also lagged at a 50-percent readiness

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<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Barabanov, ed., *Russia’s New Army*, Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Dmitry Solovyov, “Russian Army Not Fit for Modern War: Top General,” Reuters, December 16, 2008.

rate.<sup>11</sup> In the modernized Russian military, the thinking went, readiness would reign supreme, as the legacy Soviet force structure was cut and all remaining units were made permanently ready.

Reform efforts to date have largely succeeded in dismantling a legacy Soviet force structure designed for a large contact war with a peer competitor and replacing that structure with a smaller modernized force designed to be rapidly surged to crises or local wars along Russian borders. The logic of the New Look reforms suggests that Russia would not require a large mobilization base of combat-ready reserves. Therefore, Russia largely dismantled the legacy Soviet mobilization system designed for World War II–style frontal clashes or theater occupation and replaced it with a smaller, higher-readiness, and modernized force that can be surged to different strategic axes. In 2010, MDs were consolidated and given control of all General Purpose Forces in their districts. Ground force divisions were downgraded into smaller brigades designed to deploy more quickly but hold less territory. Highly mobile and more self-sufficient battalion tactical groups (BTGs) of 700 to 900 troops became the primary Ground Forces, Airborne, and naval infantry fighting elements. According to senior military leaders, brigades and their derivative BTGs were determined to be the optimal structures because they were designed to deploy rapidly to crisis areas and to resolve local wars and small armed conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

In the first four years of Russian defense reform, the total number of Russian military units was reportedly reduced by 42 percent overall. The Ground Forces faced the steepest cuts, with almost 90 percent of the units eliminated (see Table 6.3). The military disbanded all of the Ground Forces' cadre units (most of them from east of the Ural mountains), abandoned or sold their affiliated infrastructure, and moved their salvageable equipment into as many as 20 long-term storage bases

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Galeotti, *The Modern Russian Army: 1992–2016*, New York: Osprey Publishing, 2017a.

<sup>12</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 25; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

**Table 6.3**  
**Russian Force Reductions by Service, 2008 to 2012**

Service	2008 Units	2012 Units	Percent Reduction
Ground Forces	1,890	172	–90
Air Force	340	180	–48
Navy	240	123	–33
Airborne Forces	6	5	–17

SOURCE: Andrei Makarychev and Aleksandr Sergunin, “Russian Military Reform: Institutional, Political, and Security Implications,” *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2013.

or scrapped it.<sup>13</sup> The Ground Forces’ active tank inventory was reduced from 23,000 in 2008 to 2,800 by 2012, while infantry fighting vehicles were halved over the same period (thousands of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles were put into storage facilities, and the most-obsolete were scheduled to be scrapped).<sup>14</sup> The total number of artillery systems shrunk from over 23,000 (mostly towed) to approximately 5,500 (mostly self-propelled and higher caliber). Tactical air-defense systems were reduced by 35 percent.<sup>15</sup> Russia made significant cuts to its logistics system that would make sustaining a large-scale war difficult. As of 2016, Russia reportedly reduced its production and logistics facilities (which store fuel, maintenance, and other supplies) by 72 percent and its consolidated ammunition facilities by 92 percent.<sup>16</sup>

The steep reductions in Russia’s Ground Forces—the military’s largest service branch and the least modernized force—implied that

<sup>13</sup> Igor Sutyagin and Justin Bronk, *Russia’s New Ground Forces: Capabilities, Limitations and Implications for International Security*, Abingdon, UK: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2017; Bogdan Stepovoi, Aleksei Ramm, and Evgenii Andreev, “V rezerv po kontraktu,” *Izvestiya*, February 13, 2018; Aleksandr Sergunin, “On the Russian Military Reform: A Rejoinder,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, May 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Sutyagin and Bronk, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> IISS, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Sutyagin and Bronk, 2017; Ivan Safronov, “Minoborony menyaet sklady na komplekсы,” *Kommersant*, February 29, 2016.



Russia's planners did not perceive the need for a force capable of large, ground-based conflict. With fewer units in its order of battle, the Ground Forces could distribute the best equipment among their remaining units; for example, replacing obsolete towed artillery with self-propelled artillery and multiple rocket launchers.

Since 2013, Russian military training has increasingly emphasized rapid-reaction capabilities; these “snap” (minimal notice) exercises and other deployment drills have become commonplace across the Armed Forces. Four to six times a year, the military performs large-echelon snap exercises (at the CAA level or equivalent), per Gerasimov's orders.<sup>17</sup> Equipment readiness is also emphasized: According to Russian military strategists, over 90 percent of the equipment at Russian bases is required to be kept in good working order to support rapid reaction times, per permanent readiness requirements; actual serviceability rates are likely to vary by unit.<sup>18</sup> Russia has also reinstituted the “shock” designation for units meeting the highest combat readiness standards—a competitive process to improve *esprit de corps* in the Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup>

In 2015, Russia combined its air, air-defense, and space forces into the VKS, consistent with strategic writings that argue that the air and space domains have merged over time into a single aerospace domain.<sup>20</sup> As noted later in this section, in this time period, the VKS, more than the other services, received new platforms that were consistent with the stated strategy.

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<sup>17</sup> “Russian Pilots to Practice Landing on Highway During Military Drills,” TASS, January 12, 2018; V. V. Gerasimov, “Tezisy vystupleniya nachal'nika General'nogo shtaba Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii na brifinge, posvyashchennom podgotovke manevrov voisk (sil) ‘Vostok-2018,’” 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, “Operatsiia v Sirii pokazala silu Rossii,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 31, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Gerasimov, 2017b.

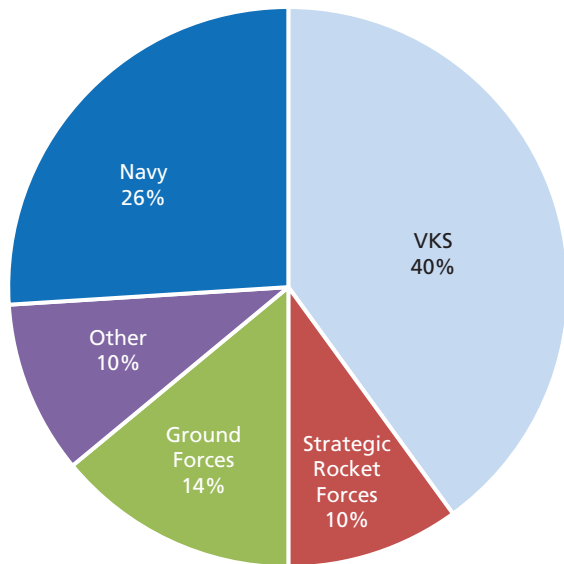
<sup>20</sup> Keir Giles, “A New Phase in Russian Military Transformation,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2014, p. 155. The Russian Air Force (*Voyenno-vozdushnye sily*) merged with the Aerospace-Defense Forces (*Voyska vozdushno-kosmicheskoy oborony*) to become the VKS, responsible for both the air and space domains.

**Russia’s Procurement Programs, 2008 to 2014**

Russia’s long-term defense procurement program during this period, the State Armaments Program to 2020 (SAP-2020), reflected the strategic emphasis on non-contact war. SAP-2020 prioritized the VKS, Navy, and conventional precision-strike capabilities associated with those services (see Figure 6.1). During this period, Russia improved and modernized its tactical aviation, air defenses, C4ISR, conventional precision-strike capabilities, early warning radar coverage, the Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS), and other constellation improvements, consistent with strategy guidance.

The VKS benefited the most of all of the services from SAP-2020. Some notable VKS procurement successes included over 400 new tactical aircraft; around 1,800 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); modernization of some strategic bombers; well over 30 surface-to-air

**Figure 6.1**  
**Approximate SAP-2020 Spending by Service, Percentage of Total**



SOURCE: Julian Cooper, *Russia’s State Armament Programme to 2020: A Quantitative Assessment of Implementation, 2011–2015*, Stockholm: Swedish Ministry of Defense, Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI-R—4239—SE, March 2016.

missile defense units, such as SA-20s and SA-21s; and many other improvements.<sup>21</sup> The Navy received an impressive amount of new or modified equipment (new submarines and precision-strike capable surface ships) after years of decline, although overall naval procurement goals fell short because of sanctions and other domain-specific defense industry problems at Russian shipyards.<sup>22</sup> Gerasimov has stated that, since 2012, Russia has achieved a “breakthrough” in its conventional precision-strike capabilities and has since serially produced the Kh-101 air-launched cruise missile (ALCM), the Kalibr land-attack cruise missile (LACM SS-N-30A SAGARIS), and the Iskander missile system (SS-26 STONE short-range ballistic missile and SSC-7 SOUTHPAW coastal defense cruise missile).<sup>23</sup>

As part of the New Look reform program, the Russian military is required to reach a 70-percent rate of new or modernized equipment by 2020. Modernization rates vary widely by service category, but in general, the VKS leads the way. As of 2018, the overall share of modernized equipment in the Russian military has risen to 61 percent; by service, 74 percent of the VKS, 55 percent of the Navy, and 82 percent of nuclear forces have been modernized, according to defense leadership.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, only 46 percent of the Ground Forces are considered modernized by Russian defense leaders (up from 15 percent in 2012).<sup>25</sup> Although there are many factors that drive procurement success, the differences across the services are revealing.

To defend against long-range strikes on its territory, Russia has improved its warning radar network, modified its air-defense systems for

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<sup>21</sup> “Russian Army Gains Over 1,500 Modern Drones in 4 Years—Defense Ministry,” *Sputnik*, January 9, 2016; Il’ya Kramnik, “Novye kryl’ya VVS Rossii: Na chem budet letat’ rossiiskaya frontovaya aviatsiya cherez 10 let,” *Izvestiya*, December 5, 2017; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2017c; Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, pp. 67–68; Gerasimov, 2017b.

<sup>22</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, “Russia’s Military Modernization Plans: 2018–2027,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 495, November 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Gerasimov, 2017b.

<sup>24</sup> “Russia to Shell Out \$46 bln on Defense Spending in 2018,” TASS, December 22, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Defense, 2017b.

arctic conditions, built new bases, and refurbished runways for combat aviation (interceptors) in the Arctic and Far East.<sup>26</sup> Since 2012, Russia has created a new Operational Strategic Command around the Northern Fleet and enhanced coastal defense, theater strike assets, and the Pacific Fleet in the Far East. To defend against enemy air or navy strikes from the Pacific (and defend its eastern submarine bastion), Russia has improved the defenses of the disputed Kuril Islands with coastal defense cruise missile systems.<sup>27</sup> Russia will also refurbish Soviet-era facilities in the Kuril Islands to support combat aviation and naval assets.<sup>28</sup>

## Evolution of Military Thinking Since 2014

Beginning around 2014, a debate emerged among Russian strategists about the nature of future conflict and the direction of Russian military strategy. Senior military commanders—many of them, unsurprisingly, from the Ground Forces—voiced their concerns about an overemphasis on non-contact warfare. These critiques are likely a result of Russia's recent conflicts in Ukraine and Syria but might also reflect skepticism, harbored since the early days of the New Look reform pro-

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<sup>26</sup> President of Russia, 2012. Russia is specifically adapting some systems, such as the S-300V4 (NATO nomenclature: SA-23) and Tor-M2 (NATO nomenclature: SA-15) surface-to-air missiles for Arctic conditions. As Stephanie Pezard et al. noted in their 2017 RAND report, the Arctic is an area of strategic importance to Russia: It is home to two-thirds of Russia's sea-based nuclear triad, it offers the shortest distances for mutual nuclear missile exchanges between the United States and Russia, and the melting of sea ice will open economic and transit opportunities for Russia in the future (Stephanie Pezard, Abbie Tingstad, Kristin Van Abel, and Scott Stephenson, *Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia: Planning for Regional Change in the Far North*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1731-RC, 2017, pp. 9–12. See also Ivan Safronov and Alexandra Dzhordzhevich, "Rub 19 Trillion Accepted for Service," *Kommersant*, November 15, 2017; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Ministr oborony Rossii vystupil s lektssiei na otkrytii II Vserossiiskogo molodezhnogo foruma v MGIMO," webpage, February 21, 2017a).

<sup>27</sup> "Unprecedented Steps': Russian Military Explores Kuril Chain Island as Potential Pacific Fleet Base," *RT*, May 27, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Roger McDermott, "Russia's Military Boosted by Syria Campaign," Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 14, No. 161, December 12, 2017; "Russia to Deploy Combat Jets on Kuril Island of Iturup," *Sputnik*, February 1, 2018.

gram, about the predominance of the non-contact war concept. Given how strongly committed defense leadership was to the concept from 2008 to 2012—when more than 30 percent of the officer cadre was discharged as part of restructuring—any ideological dissent from the Ministry of Defense’s official position at the time would have been a risky career choice for officers.<sup>29</sup>

It now appears that the decision to downsize the Ground Forces and convert it into a brigade structure in 2008 was never unanimously supported within military circles, based on recent critiques of that time period. As the analyst Aleksandr Sergunin wrote,

The [2008] transformation from divisions (that were the key element of the Soviet/Russian armed forces) to brigades is also a subject of heavy critique from many Russian military analysts. This group of experts believes that this transition will dramatically weaken the armed forces and will make it impossible to wage a large-scale war against a “strong enemy.”<sup>30</sup>

In the view of leading Russian military strategists Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, the end goals of modern warfare cannot be attained unless ground forces, equipped with high-precision weapons and electronic warfare capabilities, are committed.<sup>31</sup> General Sergei Surovikin, former commander of the Eastern Military District and now Commander of the VKS, wrote in 2014 that perhaps the earlier beliefs in non-contact warfare were overly dogmatic and veered too far away from land power: “the absolute conviction that modern wars will be exclusively non-contact and rapidly concluded affairs that are conducted only in the air and space could lead in the future to irreversible consequences.”<sup>32</sup> Other influential officers and strategists have since emphasized that while domains of modern warfare are expanding to include cyber or information operations, war between states remains,

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<sup>29</sup> Makarychev and Sergunin, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Sergunin, 2012, p. 254.

<sup>31</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Surovikin, 2014.

at its core, a clash between militaries, and Russia should have sufficient forces for such conflicts.<sup>33</sup> In 2016, the chief of the Russian Ground Forces, General Oleg Salyukov, stated that in the past there had been a “bias” toward brigades, which were not necessarily suited in all cases for the defense of such a large territory as Russia and did not allow for the proper professional growth of officers. Salyukov is probably referencing the large jump between brigade command and the next echelon up, the combined arms army.<sup>34</sup>

Military leaders mostly praise the benefits of Russia’s new capabilities, such as UAVs or long-range precision munitions; but on rare occasions, they have questioned the reliance on such expensive systems for Russia’s needs. In 2017, Gerasimov obliquely critiqued the concept of non-contact warfare, noting that it has not become the predominant form of warfare for most countries, in large part because of the expense (the high cost of associated munitions).<sup>35</sup> Russia’s recent combat experience—using long-range precision fires in Syria—has almost certainly contributed to the evolving assessments of non-contact warfare’s feasibility.

## **Posture, Procurement Decisions Increasingly Inconsistent with Stated Strategy Since 2014**

Although these debates went on among senior leaders and leading strategists, the official strategy element that emphasizes non-contact war

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<sup>33</sup> A. V. Galkin, “Forms of the Application of Military Force and the Organization of Command and Control of Integrated Armed Force Groupings in the Theater of Military Activity,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2016; Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Oleg Falichev, “Vozvrashchenie divizii,” *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur’er*, February 8, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> In a 2017 speech to the Academy of Military Sciences, Gerasimov stated: “Modern military conflicts are characterized by a number of features. The experience of the NATO operation in Yugoslavia, which opened the era of the so-called ‘non-contact’ or ‘remote’ wars, have not been widely adopted. The reason is objective—geographic, as well as economic, constraints are imposed on the achievement of war aims. The factor of the cost of armaments and war as a whole began to play an important role in the choice of methods of conducting military operations” (Gerasimov, 2017a).

and local conflicts remained unchanged. However, force posture, procurement, and other resource decisions began partially diverging from that strategy element along with additional debates about the nature of future warfare described previously. Such changes (such as the restoration of Ground Forces divisions designed for large armored clashes) probably reflect Russian reactions to the conflict in Ukraine and heightened threat perceptions of NATO since 2014. The changes in observed behavior suggest a potential evolution or shift in strategy that is not yet reflected in official documents.

### **Force Posture Decisions Since 2014**

Since 2014, the Russian military, and the Ground Forces in particular, have made several force posture modifications that are inconsistent with preparations for non-contact warfare or local wars. These changes appear to be reconfiguring segments of the military for what doctrine considers to be regional war against an advanced opponent, not local war. For example, three services (Airborne, Marines, and the Ground Forces) have become more-heavily armored since 2015, when it was announced that the Airborne Forces units would receive T-72 series tank companies and that, two years later, the Naval Infantry Brigade would receive a tank battalion, among other new heavily armored equipment.<sup>36</sup> In a reversal of its 2008 decision on Ground Forces structure, in 2013, the Russian military began to reintroduce divisions. Divisions are designed specifically to resolve combat missions along a broader front with more firepower and strike force than brigades, but entail trade-offs in mobility and rapid-response times.<sup>37</sup> Russia is replacing older artillery with higher-caliber systems, such as the Uragan-M1, Smerch, and Tornado-S multiple rocket launcher systems; upgrading the 2S35 Koalitsiya-SV, SS7M Malka, and 2S4 Tulpan self-propelled howitzers; and creating artillery brigades across

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<sup>36</sup> Jörgen Elfving, “The Tanks Are Coming: Russia Introduces Tank Units to Airborne Forces and Naval Infantry,” Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 51, April 4, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Viktor Khudoleev, “‘Vostok-2018’ kak osnovnoe sobytie goda,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, March 7, 2018.

Russia. As Connolly and Boulègue note, these upgrades expand the “range of combat missions which artillery capabilities can handle” and “boost firepower among combined-arms divisions and brigades.”<sup>38</sup>

The military announced that it would establish ten new Ground Forces divisions by the end of 2018, a decision that appears to have been hastened by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the rising tensions with NATO, given the timing of the announcements and the locations of the new units.<sup>39</sup> Eight of the ten new divisions are located in the Western and Southern MDs and were created by merging or enhancing existing brigades.<sup>40</sup> To command these units, Russia moved one CAA headquarters closer to the border of Ukraine and created two additional CAA commands outside Moscow and in Kaliningrad.<sup>41</sup> The geographic disposition of the new units is telling. With all but two of the new divisions located in the Western and Southern MDs, it is clear that Moscow views the Western strategic direction—in particular, Ukraine—as the most unstable. Furthermore, it appears that Russia believes divisions would be needed in the case of a larger war with Ukraine. These divisions could also support operations against NATO forces in the Baltics, in the unlikely contingency of a Russia-NATO conflict.

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<sup>38</sup> Connolly and Boulègue, 2018, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Galeotti, 2017a, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Galeotti, 2017a, p. 28; Khudoleev, 2018; Roger McDermott, “Salyukov Confirms Corrections to Armed Forces’ Structure,” Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 38, March 13, 2018; Nikolai Surkov, Aleksei Ramm, and Evgenii Andreev, “Severnyi Kavkaz ukrepili diviziyami,” *Izvestiya*, February 16, 2018. Only one unit, the 150th Motorized Rifle Division, has been built from scratch. Russia plans to convert the final two brigades into divisions by the end of 2018. The 19th Motorized Rifle Division will be restored to its pre-reform size in 2008, split between the cities of Vladikavkaz and Mozdok. The 136th Brigade at Buynaksk will be upgraded to a division, using existing military infrastructure.

<sup>41</sup> Russia created the 1st Guards Tank Army outside Moscow and the 11th Army Corps headquarters element in Kaliningrad “in response to NATO military buildup at the Russian border” and moved the 20th CAA command from east of Moscow closer to Belarus and Ukraine (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 53; “‘It Can’t Go Unanswered’: Russia Will Respond to NATO Buildup Near Its Borders, Senior Diplomat Says,” *RT*, May 31, 2016; “New Motor Rifle Division to Guard Russia’s Southern Frontiers,” TASS, December 2, 2016).



Changes to the structure of the Russian Ground Forces, Naval Infantry, and Airborne Troops (VDV) since 2014 can be considered at least a partial revision of the 2008 reforms, which sought to build lighter and more-flexible forces that were less suited for large positional warfare and more suited for rapid response along the periphery. The military does not appear to be transitioning to an all-division structure, and military leaders are adamant that a mixed division and brigade posture is best for Russia's needs.<sup>42</sup> Some estimates suggest that Russia's newest divisions will be up to 30 percent smaller than their Soviet predecessors.<sup>43</sup> Undeniably, the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent fallout in relations with Ukraine and the West have led Russia to alter its Ground Forces posture and structure. However, the Air Force, Navy, and strategic nuclear forces have not seen similar levels of revision to New Look defense reforms. Thus, the changes likely reflect some degree of internal course correction to what the New Look reforms originally envisioned.

### **Procurement Adjustments Since 2014**

International sanctions against Russia and a devaluation of the ruble led to adjustments in the federal budget after 2014. Downward revisions in the procurement program caused delays or cancellations for next-generation equipment across the services, with a significant impact on most of the Ground Forces' next-generation armored equipment programs. The T-14 Armata tank, along with the Kurganets and Bumerang armored combat vehicles, were postponed most likely because of budgetary considerations. For example, the procurement program initially planned to acquire 2,300 Armata tanks as part of SAP-2020 spending, but by 2017 had slashed the order to 70 as Moscow instead pursued widespread modernization of legacy platforms.<sup>44</sup> Given new financial realities, it appears that Russian planners have decided that upgraded legacy platforms will suffice in the near term.

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<sup>42</sup> IISS, 2017, p. 212; Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 25; McDermott, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 52; Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Russia's Ground Force: Organization, Armament, Prospects," webpage, May 27, 2018b.

<sup>44</sup> Sutyagin and Bronk, 2017.

Beyond short-term revisions, procurement to 2025 and beyond could also be shifting emphasis away from non-contact warfare. Preliminary reporting on the next SAP—SAP-2027—suggests a greater role for land power and a more balanced allocation across the services. SAP-2027 is expected to increase spending for Ground and Airborne Forces over the previous program from 14 percent to 25 percent. Russia will prioritize additional production of the Iskandr SS-26 short-range ballistic missile system, high-powered artillery and multiple rocket launchers (Urugan, Tornado-S, and Koalitsiya), and modernized tanks.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, naval procurement will decrease from 26 percent to 12 percent as Russia delays large “blue water” surface ships and prioritizes smaller classes of ships armed with precision-guided munitions, according to scholar Dmitry Gorenburg.<sup>46</sup> As Gorenburg notes, this revision can be explained by external events that have forced a recalibration in long-term defense spending and by domestic or parochial requirements to keep wide swaths of the defense industry funded (particularly for those areas not prioritized in the previous SAP).

Rumored SAP-2027 priorities include nuclear modernization, high-precision weapons launched from legacy platforms, new classes of hypersonic missiles, and the continued improvement of the General Purpose Forces. While non-contact warfare capabilities are clearly still a priority, these expensive systems now make up a smaller percentage of the overall procurement program. Russia has preserved funding for coastal defense systems, ALCMs (such as the Kh-101), military transport aviation (VTA), and tactical aviation orders for the Su-30SM, Su-35, Su-34, and MiG-35 aircraft. In this time period, the VKS will continue to acquire S-400s, possibly limited numbers of the S-500, and SHORAD systems, such as the Buk-M3 (SA-17) and Pantsir (SA-22).<sup>47</sup> The defense industry will continue serial production of modernized variants of proven platforms, such as ten new TU-160M2 BLACK-

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<sup>45</sup> Connolly and Boulègue, 2018; Tsentr analiza strategii i tekhnologii, *Gosudarstvennyye programmy voozuzheniya Rossiiskoi Federatsii: problemy ispolneniya i potentsial optimizatsii*, Moscow, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Gorenburg, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Safronov and Dzhordzhevich, 2017.

JACKs to 2027, and will modernize 62 Tu-22M3 Backfires and an unknown number of Tu-95M BEARs.<sup>48</sup>

### **Mobilization Enhancements Since 2014**

From 2008 to roughly 2015, Russia's military mobilization system was largely dormant as Russia addressed more-pressing concerns, such as force restructuring, modernization, conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, and the effects of sanctions on the Russian economy. Although some estimates put the number of potential Russian reserve personnel at two million, most of these demobilized officers and enlisted personnel have not been regularly training or otherwise maintaining their skills.<sup>49</sup> This low priority is consistent with a strategic emphasis on non-contact warfare and local wars. As Russian manpower expert Vladimir Ostankov noted in 2014,

The composition and structure of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, formed as a result of the reforms of 2008–2012, allow in wartime only a slight increase in the combat strength of the groupings of troops (forces) on the basis of mobilization of the storage and repair base for weapons and equipment, and the lack of strategic reserves significantly restricts the possibility of the Supreme Command to plan and conduct military operations on a large scale.<sup>50</sup>

Since 2012, Russia has examined ways to create a professional mobilization reserve, first codified in the May Decrees and signed into law in 2013. Initial attempts to create this reserve were abandoned because of a lack of resources, but Putin renewed a pilot program in 2015 with an initial target of 5,000 troops. Reportedly, citizens who enter the professional reserve are required to train two to three days per

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<sup>48</sup> Gorenburg, 2017; Vladimir Mukhin, "The Army Is Short of Mobility and High-Precision Weapons," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 31, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> IISS, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Vladimir Ostankov, "Strategicheskikh rezervov net," *Voenno-Promyshlenyi Kur'er*, March 17, 2014.

month and participate in one month-long training event per year.<sup>51</sup> In 2018, the decision was made to expand the effort across the country.<sup>52</sup>

In 2017, Russian analysts noted that around ten equipment storage bases would each, under a general mobilization order, be able to receive a brigade's worth of reservists (transported via rail and plane) and deploy them within days.<sup>53</sup> Each storage base would allegedly maintain a full brigade set and 2.5 brigade sets of ammunition at high readiness, and this equipment would be fueled and periodically tested to maintain operational readiness. However, according to anecdotal Russian press reporting, these bases are understaffed to the extent that they cannot keep the equipment in good working order; there is also little evidence that these storage bases can receive reservists for training purposes.<sup>54</sup> As part of SAP-2027, Russia is also reportedly allocating 1 trillion rubles to improve its weapons storage and other infrastructure, but details on this plan are scant.<sup>55</sup>

Russia has taken other steps to add mobilization capability that are inconsistent with the stated strategy that large-scale land wars are unlikely. According to a 2011 plan, the Ministry of Defense was going to scrap 10,000 armored vehicles from the Soviet era. However, in 2017, the decision was made to retain or modernize 9,000 of these vehicles. According to Russian press reporting, two reasons for the altered plans, in addition to a "change in the international situation," were to modernize the T-80BV tank and to help fill out the newly formed tank and motorized rifle divisions.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Stepovoi, Ramm, and Andreev, 2018; Elfving, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Evgenii Burdinskii, "Puti sovershenstvovaniya sistemy komplektovaniya vooruzhennykh sil i podgotovki mobilizatsionnykh resursov," *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 2, No. 55, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Sutyagin and Bronk, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Stepovoi, Ramm, and Andreev, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Verkhovnyi Glavnokomanduyushchii Vooruzhennymi Silami Rossii Vladimir Putin prinyal uchastie v rabote rasshirennogo zasedaniya Kollegii Minoborony," webpage, December 22, 2017d.

<sup>56</sup> Aleksei Nikolskii, "Minoborony prekratit utilizatsiyu starykh tankov," *Izvestiya*, 2017.

Russia's military mobilization system in 2018 is very much a work in progress, and it does not appear to be as high a priority as improving military-civilian mobilization capabilities. It is difficult to judge whether the recent mobilization tinkering stems from a change in threat perception or from a desire to improve a system that had been neglected for too long. Regardless of the reason, Russia still considers military mobilization a key part of territorial defense. Moving forward, the Russian military will retain some capability to train reservists and provide equipment of varying quality for them to use. Nevertheless, without significant attention, the mobilization base does not appear to be sufficient to sustain a large-scale land war in the midterm, up to at least 2025.

### **Exercise Scale Since 2014**

We evaluated the scenarios and activities of Russia's largest strategic exercises to determine trends and points of emphasis since 2012. We detected a steady increase in the scale and complexity of these exercises. After 2016 in particular, these exercises focused more on larger-scale operations than on local war or non-contact warfare. There are two equally plausible explanations for the trend. Russian exercises have incrementally become more complex over the past decade since the start of the New Look reforms. Alternatively, the recent acceleration in size and complexity could be a direct result of the conflict in Ukraine and rising tensions with NATO.

Large strategic Russian exercises are annual events that feature participation from all service branches and often include ground maneuvers, air and air-defense drills, and naval exercises to defend against a notional enemy aerospace attack, and strategic mobility.<sup>57</sup> The number of personnel in these exercises has increased significantly in recent years (see Figure 6.2). For example, within eight years, the reported number of personnel in the Vostok series of exercises in the

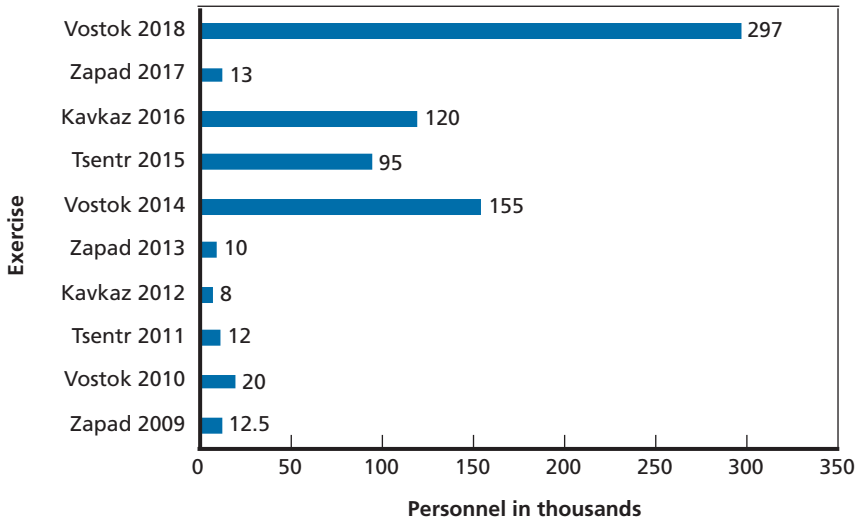
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<sup>57</sup> Norberg, 2015. Also consistent with these developments is Russia's increasingly routine testing of state agencies and military assets in these strategic exercises, which has broadened over time since the National Defense Control Center was created, to involve up to 100,000 civilian personnel and 50 state entities by 2016.

Russian Far East grew from 20,000 to 297,000.<sup>58</sup> Russia's official numbers are likely to be inflated (presumably by counting notional participation versus field-deployed troops).

Prior to 2016, these exercises typically featured forces from one MD, with a limited number of other units from central Russia deployed to border areas to examine strategic mobility. Since 2016, Russia's largest annual training exercises have encompassed multiple MDs across the country—a departure from past patterns. Since 2017, two exercises have

**Figure 6.2**  
**Size of Russian Military Exercises, 2009 to 2018**



SOURCES: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2018; Norberg, 2015; Kofman, 2017; Johnson 2017; Government of Russia, 2015.

NOTE: While technically involving only 13,000 troops, Zapad exercises are effectively much larger because several related exercises are conducted simultaneously. A single exercise with over 13,000 troops west of the Urals would require Russia to invite observers under the terms of the Vienna Document of 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Norberg, 2015; Michael Kofman, "What Actually Happened During Zapad 2017," blog post, *Russian Military Analysis*, December 22, 2017; Dave Johnson, "ZAPAD 2017 and Euro-Atlantic Security," *NATO Review*, December 14, 2017; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Report by the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation—First Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, During the Briefing on the Vostok 2018 Maneuvers," 2018.

involved multiple MDs and appear to have happened across many “strategic directions” or large fronts simultaneously. For example, Zapad 2017 featured multidomain events from the Arctic to Northeastern Europe, and Vostok 2018 addressed challenges in the Arctic, Central Russia, and the Russian Far East.<sup>59</sup> Vostok 2018 involved 1,000 aircraft and a rumored 36,000 pieces of equipment, including 1,100 tanks and more than 50 combat ships.<sup>60</sup> Participating units deployed three MDs and the Joint Strategic-Command Northern Fleet. China sent a reported 3,000 participants for the first time.

As noted in Chapter Four, these exercises are also including more civilian assets for partial state mobilization, which suggests that Russia is not exercising for a local war (which military forces would be able to address) but rather for a regional war that would require significant whole-of-government support. The evolution of these military exercises into events that are larger and more complex, and that involve greater integration of state resources appears inconsistent with Russia’s stated doctrinal focus on local war and seems more suited toward a larger and more intense regional war. Although the exercises contain non-contact war elements, these events do not correspond with the strong emphasis placed on non-contact war in Russia’s stated military strategy.

## Conclusions

At least until 2014, Russia’s resource decisions and behaviors were well aligned with its stated strategy of focusing on non-contact warfare and fighting local wars against nonpeer competitors. However, Russia’s decisions and behaviors since 2014 suggest that there has been a partial divergence from the stated directives. Specifically, Russia’s military appears to have shifted from its earlier emphasis on non-contact warfare in favor of a greater role for land power and for large clashes of military forces. Russia’s reintroduction of heavily armored, less-mobile forces

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<sup>59</sup> Gerasimov, 2017b; Kofman, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Mathieu Boulègue, “Russia’s Vostok Exercises Were Both Serious Planning and a Show,” blog post, Chatham House, September 17, 2018.

into the Airborne, Naval Infantry, and Ground Forces—along with the increased scope and scale of military exercises across the services—suggests that Moscow could be shifting from its earlier focus on local war to a larger echelon of combat—regional war.

It would appear that Russia's combat experiences in Ukraine and subsequent tensions with NATO shifted the military's focus since 2014 and shaped its direction through 2025.<sup>61</sup> This new post-2014 environment created long-term uncertainty in Russian military planning and likely exacerbated existing disagreements among senior officers over the direction of military strategy. There appears to have been a shift toward the regional-war echelon in particular. It is clear from the military's resource choices that, after 2014, local wars and non-contact warfare were no longer the dominant planning factors for force development.

Our analysis of Russian orders of battle, planned procurements, and mobilization plans does not indicate that Moscow is reconstituting the capabilities needed for a protracted, conventional World War II-style war of large territorial occupation. However, a course correction seems to be in progress and is shifting some of the previous emphasis on non-contact warfare and local wars back toward the Ground Forces and regional wars.

To bring actions and stated strategy back into alignment, it is possible that Russia might revise its Military Doctrine and other strategic documents to reflect a changed understanding of threats. We would expect any new military strategy documents to point toward an increasing likelihood of armed clashes between great powers (or their respective alliances), perhaps citing the United States' strategic emphasis on great-power competition as a rationale. Furthermore, it is likely that Russian military exercises will continue to expand in size and scope, and current trends suggest that these annual strategic exercises or readiness checks will soon involve participation across all of Russia's MDs.

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<sup>61</sup> Other factors, such as the military-industrial complex's pursuit of narrow corporate interests, could have played a role as well.



## **Strategy Element: Limited Expeditionary Ambitions**

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### **Stated Strategy**

Russia's stated strategy suggests that Moscow has little need to develop a military focused on expeditionary capabilities, with the exceptions of maintaining the global reach of its nuclear forces and core naval missions, such as operating in international waters to fulfill defense tasks. Russian strategy documents emphasize that the most significant security challenges to Russia are on its immediate periphery. However, the Russian military has waged a multiyear campaign in Syria in support of a besieged ally, raising questions about Russia's expeditionary ambitions. In this chapter, we evaluate the extent to which Russia's resource decisions and behaviors are consistent with its stated strategy claims. We assess Russia's resource decisions to determine whether the military is preparing for sustained expeditionary missions; if it is, that would contradict its stated strategy.

Most of the named national security threats to Russia in its National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine stem from the country's immediate environs. These threats include the buildup of NATO military infrastructure on Russia's borders, the deployment of third-party military forces to states contiguous with Russia, the use of military force on the territory of states contiguous with Russia, the presence of terrorist or foreign mercenary groups in areas near the borders of Russia and its allies, and the overthrow and establishment of new

hostile regimes in states contiguous with Russia.<sup>1</sup> Although the Kremlin wants to play a more active role in the resolution of international conflicts and brandish its great-power credentials, it has attempted to balance those desires carefully against what its military capabilities and economy can bear.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, when discussing Russia's defense budget, Putin was explicit:

We have to be smart. We will not rely solely on “military muscle,” and we will not be drawn into an economically depleting, senseless arms race. We don't need an endless number of bases throughout the world and will not play [the role of] world gendarme.<sup>3</sup>

## Evaluation Method

In contrast with U.S. doctrine, which defines *expeditionary force* in Joint Publication 3-0: *Joint Operations* as “an armed force organized to achieve a specific objective in a foreign country,” and an *expedition* as “a military operation conducted by an armed force to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country,” there are few definitions of expeditionary operations or forces in Russia's strategic documents.<sup>4</sup> However, one prominent Russian military dictionary defines *expeditionary forces* as follows:

a component of the armed forces of a state (coalition of states) that has been transported by sea or by air to the territory of another state to fulfill certain military, political and strategic tasks: seiz-

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<sup>1</sup> See section 12 in Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> President of Russia, “Interv'yū Vladimira Putina teleradiokompanii ‘Mir’,” April 12, 2017b.

<sup>3</sup> “Brains over Bucks: Putin Hints AI May Be Key to Russia Beating U.S. in Defense Despite Budget Gap,” *RT*, December 24, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, incorporating Change 1, October 22, 2018, p. GL-9; Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as amended through February 15, 2016, p. 83.

ing or defending territory, taking control of key areas, assisting allied armies, etc. Usually united by a single command, with the support from their homeland and from the sea for a finite period. The actions of American and British troops in Europe, Asia and Africa during the First and Second World Wars are an example of expeditionary forces' behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Using this Russian definition as a basis, we use the term *regional power projection* to refer to deployment to a state contiguous with the Russian Federation or, like Kyrgyzstan, accessible via other friendly post-Soviet states, and we define *expeditionary warfare* as out-of-area power projection by air or sea and deployment to a state not contiguous with the Russian Federation. We assess the degree to which the Russian military is structurally capable of expeditionary warfare by first identifying a model for expeditionary force requirements, characteristics, and observable behaviors. We focus on identifying unique capabilities that would support out-of-area power projection and not necessarily regional power projection—for example, air and sea lift capabilities or global logistics agreements as opposed to rail transit capability. We then consider whether the Russian military possesses or is developing those capabilities and whether it is engaging in those activities. This model also helps identify key capability gaps for out-of-area power projection.

Thierry Gongora offers two models for expeditionary force requirements: a Base (or basic) Expeditionary Model and a Robust Expeditionary Model. The characteristics of these models (which are not specific to Russia) can be found in Tables 7.1 and 7.2. Using Gongora's models, we posit the likely observable behaviors for each characteristic as shown in the tables.

For this analysis, we distill Gongora's characteristics into three pillars of an out-of-area force: readiness (in terms of personnel and equipment), mobility (in terms of strategic lift, modular force structure, and secure deployment routes), and sustainability (in terms of forward logistics or other in-theater support, basing networks, and interoperability with partners). We generate two sets of observable characteristics:

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<sup>5</sup> Rogozin, *Voina i Mir v Terminakh i Opredeleniyakh*, 2017.

**Table 7.1**  
**Characteristics of a Basic Expeditionary Force**

Characteristic	Capability	Likely Observable Behavior
High readiness	Deploy and respond quickly to a crisis	High training tempos, advanced scenarios, deployable personnel and equipment
Sustainability	Sustain continuous deployment and recovery during campaign	Deployments from same unit; high personnel availability rates (e.g., at least 2:1 deployment to allow for one subunit deployed, one recuperating, one training)
Strategic mobility	Deploy sufficient force and combat support to area of operations quickly or on order	Large numbers of strategic lift (air, sea, rail) and enablers (transport, tankers)
Deployable command and control	Command forces from extended distances	Sufficient numbers, variation, and redundant C4ISR assets; burden-sharing among allies; GLONASS
Interoperability with coalition partners	Establish stable agreements and coordinated actions with host-nation or coalition partners	Integrated battlespace management; common weapons; joint training; Status of Forces Agreements
In-theater support	Reduce organic logistics requirements with stable agreements in theater	Contracts for life-support, fuel, or other needs using local nationals, companies, housing
Modular forces	Organize forces by task across variety of conflict contingencies	Use of joint task forces, BTGs, ad hoc command relationships

SOURCE: Gongora, 2002.

**Table 7.2**  
**Additional Characteristics of a Robust or Advanced Expeditionary Force**

Characteristic	Capability	Likely Observable Behavior
All-terrain-capable forces	Operate in different theaters, climates, or conditions	Equipment modifications for multiple climates
Forcible entry	Force entry into denied area or theater	Training (assault landing, SEAD, offensive counterair); affiliated procurement choices
Full-spectrum force protection for forces abroad	Defend forward operating bases	Base security and defenses; missile defense; SHORAD; redundant communications
Reconstitution while forward-deployed	Regenerate, reorganize, replenish, reorient for a new mission without having to return to home garrison	Sufficient on-hand maintenance and life support available; equipment and personnel forward-based on permanent or semipermanent status
Multimission capable	Shift missions on same deployment or expedition (e.g., from combat operations to peacekeeping)	Training across ROMO; force posture can support ROMO
Sustainment in austere environment without host-nation support	Organically provide all necessary combat and life-support supplies	Deployable organic assets available, to include field hospitals, kitchens, port security, materiel, and logistics

SOURCE: Gongora, 2002.

NOTES: ROMO = range of military operations; SEAD = suppression of enemy air defense; SHORAD = short-range air defense. An advanced expeditionary force will have the aspects of the Basic Expeditionary Force in Table 7.1, plus the attributes listed in this table.

**Table 7.3**  
**Positing Notional Characteristics for Russian Power-Projection Forces**

Characteristic	Regional Power-Projection Force	Out-of-Area Expeditionary Force
Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed manning (conscript or contract service)</li> <li>• Legal limitations on deployment</li> <li>• Low equipment serviceability, or highly variable unit readiness rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Globally deployable personnel (highly trained and contract service)</li> <li>• High equipment serviceability rates</li> </ul>
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic lift limits deployment size</li> <li>• Force structure heavy or bulky, not designed for air or sea transport</li> <li>• Cross-country mobility drills emphasized</li> <li>• Ad hoc deployment routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate strategic lift for large force</li> <li>• Modular force structure</li> <li>• Air, sea deployment training emphasized</li> <li>• Secure deployment route</li> </ul>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of overseas basing and logistics</li> <li>• Allies lack capability to support operations; little in-theater support</li> <li>• Minimal base-defense capability</li> <li>• Insufficient on-hand maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available forward basing and logistics</li> <li>• Interoperability with partners or allies, or other in-theater support</li> <li>• Expeditionary base defense assets</li> <li>• Robust forward maintenance capability</li> </ul>

one for a regional power-projection force and one for an expeditionary force (see Table 7.3).

As mentioned previously, Russia's stated strategy does not articulate a clear need or desire for expeditionary postures and operations. If there were a match between the stated strategy and resource decisions, we would not expect the Russian military to develop an expeditionary capability. We would not expect Russia to acquire characteristics associated with Gongora's Robust Expeditionary Model, or even most attributes of the Basic Expeditionary Model. If Russian posture were primarily oriented toward territorial defense or regional power projection as is stated in its strategy, we would expect to see a trend toward heavier armored equipment (less deployable via air or sea, and meant to operate near repair and logistics bases); levels of strategic air and sea lift that are suitable for Russian territorial defense but not for a globally expeditionary force; and little to no effort to establish extraregional military bases or logistics hubs abroad.

To test whether Russia's behaviors and resource decisions match its stated strategy, we evaluate Russia's power-projection forces across the three characteristics of readiness, mobility, and sustainability. Using the framework in Table 7.3, we assess whether Russia's decisions are reflective of force development for either regional power-projection or expeditionary missions.

## Readiness

Over the past ten years, the Russian military has prioritized personnel readiness through conducting active training tempos and snap exercises, maintaining high equipment serviceability rates, and recategorizing all units into "permanently ready" units—the highest readiness category. Although these efforts contribute to making a force ready to respond to short-notice orders, they do not necessarily create a force structured for large expeditionary operations. We explore readiness trends in Russian training patterns, the personnel system, and equipment serviceability in this section.

## Training

Russian exercises are focused almost exclusively on territorial defense or regional contingencies and not on out-of-area deployments. Since 2013, Gerasimov has ordered hundreds of no-notice snap exercises to test readiness across the services in addition to the active 12-month training cycle. Many of these training exercises involve airspace defense, close air support, and dispersal training (rapid deployment to other bases or even highways as makeshift airstrips to survive an aerospace attack).<sup>6</sup>

Strategic mobility, which could be a dual-purpose skill for cross-country transit or for out-of-area deployment, looms large in the Russian training program. Russian civilian and military leadership prioritizes the concept of *strategic mobility*: the ability to rapidly deploy from one Russian theater of operations to another (for example, from central Russia to western Russia, or from the west to the far east).<sup>7</sup> The ability to traverse these extreme distances can also be used to support power projection, but this could be considered an incidental dual-purpose capability rather than a deliberate decision to develop an expeditionary force. The military conducts strategic mobility drills from the interior to different theaters and to borders over fairly extreme distances. Russia spans 11 time zones, so deploying cross-country is in itself a strategic mobility exercise, involving much longer distances than many potential expeditionary contingencies, such as the Syria operation. Since 2010, strategic mobility has factored into the annual strategic exercises, such as Zapad or Vostok, suggesting that Russia views its military as a resource that can be drawn from for threats coming from any direction.<sup>8</sup>

When Russian Ground Forces practice strategic mobility drills, the focus appears to be on territorial defense or theater contingencies, as units are typically brought by rail from the interior to support a

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<sup>6</sup> “Russian Pilots to Practice Landing on Highway During Military Drills,” 2018.

<sup>7</sup> In 2018, Putin again ordered the mobility of the Armed Forces to be improved over current levels. However, the procurement decisions to 2027 do not seem to support this directive (Mukhin, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> As Johan Norberg noted, “The point should not be what units Russia had in, say, the Western Military District, but what units Russia could bring to the Western Military District in what time” (Norberg, 2015, p. 63).



notional border crisis. As Putin noted in 2017, Ground Forces training should emphasize “mobility and their readiness for far-flung deployment within the shortest time possible.”<sup>9</sup> The Ground Forces can move across long distances using rail transit, but deployment via rail outside Russia is limited by the unique broad rail gauge used by former Soviet republics, including the Baltics. The Ground Forces do not practice maritime deployment.

In recent years, the training programs of the VKS have emphasized many skills that could be considered beneficial for both out-of-area operations and regional conflict. The VKS overhauled its training program in 2011 and, since then, has emphasized more-advanced skills, such as long-range sorties, aerial refueling, and night training. The VKS has quadrupled annual pilot flight hours, from 30 in 2003 to around 120 by 2012.<sup>10</sup> Russian tactical aviation has conducted increasingly frequent deployments across most of the country, with the use of stopover or “lily pad” airfields and a strong emphasis on aerial refueling.<sup>11</sup> In 2015, the lily pad approach, not aerial refueling, was used for deployment to Syria. Why Russia preferred to use the lily pad approach rather than aerial refueling for an operational deployment is uncertain, it is possible that Russia simply wanted to minimize any difficulties or uncertainties during a sensitive mission, and regional partners were willing to provide airfields for stopover and refueling. Russia’s air force units do not use refueling tankers for operations inside Syria, either, most likely because of the short distances between Russia’s air base in Syria and intended targets.

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<sup>9</sup> “Putin Shares His View on What Russian Army Needs Most,” TASS, January 26, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> “A New Year of Training Engagements,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, December 1, 2011; “It Is Good That the Bears Are Flying! A Report from the Airbase, from Which Long Range Aviation Goes Out on Combat Patrol,” *Izvestiya*, December 21, 2007; “A Common Sense Course,” *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur’er*, November 20, 2013; IISS, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “This Year Il-78 and Il-78M Tankers Performed Around 380 Refueling Operations,” December 20, 2012; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “The Southern Military District Commander Has Summed Up the Results of the Activities of the Troops and Forces in the Winter Training Period,” May 22, 2017b.

## Manning

The Russian military's mixed-manning system is inconsistent with an out-of-area expeditionary mission emphasis. Just under half of Russia's enlisted personnel are 12-month conscripts, which renders a major portion of Russian manpower not only unsuitable for complex extra-regional operations but also legally unavailable (barring general mobilization, conscripts with fewer than four months of training cannot serve in combat zones, according to federal law, and current General Staff policy exempts conscripts from combat duty, either abroad or domestically).<sup>12</sup> Thus, more than a quarter of Russia's authorized active duty manpower cannot legally be used in combat operations abroad.<sup>13</sup> These rules are not religiously observed; Russian human rights groups maintain that some conscripts participated in combat operations in eastern Ukraine in 2014.<sup>14</sup>

Russian officers and professional enlisted personnel can be deployed to conflict zones overseas. In 2016, Russia's professional enlisted force slightly exceeded the number of conscripts for the first time in the country's history.<sup>15</sup> The Russian military plans to transition to a majority contract force "eventually," according to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, but he has not indicated when this transition will occur.<sup>16</sup> The General Staff has deliberately cycled commanders and aircrews at a rapid pace through Syria, where a reported 80 percent

<sup>12</sup> "Voennosluzhashchie po prizyvu ne budut uchastvovat' v boevykh deistviyakh," RIA Novosti, February 14, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> In 2017, the military consisted of around 276,000 conscripts and 384,000 contract service personnel and an estimated 220,000 to 270,000 officers, based on Russian draft numbers and proclamations about on-hand strength being 93 percent for a 1-million-strong force (IISS, 2018; Paul Goble, "Despite Cut in Draft Numbers, Russia Unlikely to Have Fully Professional Army Soon," Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 24, No. 124, October 5, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Nadja Douglas, "Civil-Military Relations in Russia: Conscript vs Contract Army, or How Ideas Prevail Against Functional Demands," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> IISS, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Anton Lavrov, "Towards a Professional Army," Centre for Analyses of Strategies and Technologies, *Moscow Defense Brief*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2016.

of combat aviation crews and 95 percent of helicopter crews (from the deployed platform classes) have gained out-of-area combat experience in three years, according to 2018 numbers.<sup>17</sup>

### Serviceability

Another key readiness factor for an expeditionary military is a high equipment serviceability rate. Generally speaking, the higher the serviceability rate, the more predictable and available the force is for use, which is especially critical when operating abroad and away from base maintenance facilities. If equipment serviceability and reliability rates are low, as was the case in 2008 when Russia invaded Georgia, Russia would have to cobble together ad hoc groups of equipment and personnel to sustain a fighting force abroad.<sup>18</sup> This method is possible for small groupings of forces, but it becomes less feasible for operations at larger scales. As of 2016, Russian press reporting claimed the following serviceability rates: 63 percent for the VKS (96 percent for Air Defense Forces), 76 percent for the Navy, 94 percent for armored vehicles, and 93 percent for rockets and artillery.<sup>19</sup>

Since 2015, Russian operations in Syria have provided an interesting window into how much equipment Russia can easily maintain in an out-of-area operation. The size and structure of the Russian Group of Forces in Syria fluctuates but has generally consisted of 3,000 to 5,000 personnel, helicopters, around two squadrons of attack and multirole aircraft, and a small ground presence. This force maintains a high operational tempo, often flying multiple short sorties daily.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, “The Russian Armed Forces in Syria: Assessing Russian Reforms,” webpage, May 16, 2018a; Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2017b.

<sup>18</sup> In August 2008, Moscow had to pull trained pilots from across western Russia to fight in Georgia because of low proficiency and serviceability rates. Ground Forces, by and large, deployed as whole units to Georgia.

<sup>19</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, “Ot kolichestva—k kachestvu,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, February 8, 2016. These numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, given the lack of hard evidence provided to support them.

<sup>20</sup> Maksim Shepovalenko, ed., *Siriiskii rubezh*, Moscow: Tsentr Analiza Strategii i Tekhnologii, 2016.

This task-organized force is drawn from multiple units based in several MDs. Russian combat search-and-rescue teams in Syria seem adequate to recover personnel from behind enemy lines.<sup>21</sup> Over three years, Russia has deployed 1,200 defense industry specialists (engineers and other scientists) to Syria to correct problems with equipment and to give these specialists hands-on experience with these weapons' performance in different climates and battlespaces.<sup>22</sup> However, this ad hoc and direct support from the defense industry also implies that there were indeed significant problems with the new equipment that were beyond the capability of organic unit maintainers to address. Russia can cope with these challenges for a small deployment to Syria, but they would be difficult to overcome at scale or in multiple geographic locations abroad.

## Mobility

To evaluate Russia's ability to deploy via air and sea, we considered strategic lift capacity, the modularity and deployability of force structure, and secure deployment routes. Mobility challenges, notably in strategic lift, will constrain Moscow's ability to support forces for large- or medium-scale out-of-area operations. According to one Russian analyst, the upper limit for a comfortable out-of-area operation might be 5,000 personnel.<sup>23</sup> Without the ability to deploy and sustain much larger force sizes for out-of-area operations, the Russian military is not an expeditionary force, at least in the U.S. understanding of the term. But a 5,000-strong force, with appropriately scoped operational objectives, might be considered a successful expeditionary force in the

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Lee, "Russia's Military Operation in Syria," *Moscow Defense Brief*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Tikhonov, 2018.

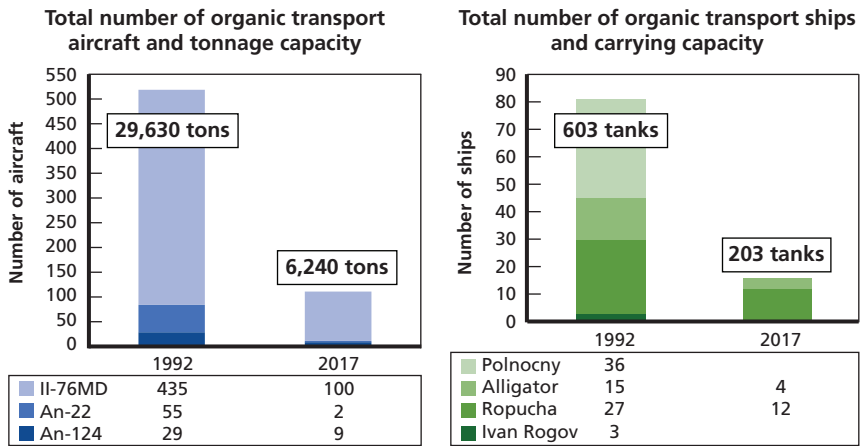
<sup>23</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018a.

emerging Russian “strategy of limited action,” a term Gerasimov used to describe the Syria operation in a 2019 speech.<sup>24</sup>

In general, the VKS has a limited number of refueling tankers, which are shared between Russia’s strategic bomber fleet and tactical aviation. Russia also faces severe limitations in strategic air and sea lift, marked by steep declines in both since 1992 (see Figure 7.1). Simply put, Russia does not have the capacity to support large out-of-area operations without cutting into its capability requirements for territorial defense.

One telling metric is a comparison of Russian and U.S. strategic air lift assets. Although the active duty U.S. military is only 25 percent larger than the Russian military in terms of authorized billets, the former has a 3.7:1 advantage over Russia when it comes to the number

**Figure 7.1**  
**Russia’s Heavy Air and Sea Lift Capacities, 1992 Versus 2017**



SOURCES: IISS, *The Military Balance 1992*, Vol. 92, London: Routledge, 1992; IISS, 2017.

NOTES: We selected a notional “tank” rather than tonnage as a measure of carrying capacity, because square footage is a greater limiting factor than weight for most transport ships. Translating square footage to tanks gives a clearer idea of how many vehicles could be transported per ship.

<sup>24</sup> Valerii Gerasimov, “Vektory razvitiya voennoi strategii,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, March 4, 2019.

of heavy and medium transport aircraft, a 6:1 advantage in Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, and a whopping 26:1 advantage in tanker and multirole transport aircraft.<sup>25</sup>

A large percentage of Russia's military transport aviation (VTA) consists of Ukrainian-produced aircraft—the An-124 heavy transport aircraft and the smaller An-22, An-26, An-72, and An-12 aircraft—which Russia can no longer purchase because of the breakdown in relations with Ukraine and resulting trade restrictions.<sup>26</sup> Russia has nine An-124 as of 2018. The defense industry has built only seven heavy military transport aircraft since the Soviet Union collapsed.<sup>27</sup> Because of severed ties with Ukraine, some Ilyushin production lines are being retooled to produce more Il-76MD transport aircraft in the decade ahead.<sup>28</sup> To reconstitute and replenish its strategic air lift, Russia plans on purchasing around 100 Il-112V light transport aircraft and 40 Il-76MD90A modernized transports before 2027, as the previous generation of aircraft is phased out.<sup>29</sup>

Russia faces severe limitations with aerial refueling, even for homeland defense needs. Russia maintains around 20 total Il-78 and Il-78M refueling tankers; Russian analysts have noted that, for territorial defense, Russia requires at least 40 tankers.<sup>30</sup> Il-78 tankers' primary responsibility is to refuel Russia's long-range aviation fleet, and support to tactical aviation is a secondary mission. Any aspirations for a global or out-of-area expeditionary force would require even more aircraft of this class. However, Russia has cancelled orders for the new Il-96-400TX

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<sup>25</sup> IISS, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> As a comparison, in the last decade of the Soviet Union, around 1,000 Il-76 and Il-78 tankers were constructed in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan (Mukhin, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Pavel Kazarnovskiy, "The Ulyanovsk Aviation Complex Began Preparation for Restoration of An-124 Production," *RBC*, June 19, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> "Russian Defense Ministry Plans to Buy Over 100 Il-22V Light Transport Aircraft," *Interfax*, April 11, 2018; Gorenburg, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> "Answers by CINC Air Force at Meeting with Mass Media Representatives in RF Defense Ministry Press Club," *Integrum-Tekhn*, August 5, 2008; IISS, 2018; Mukhin, 2018.

super tanker.<sup>31</sup> If Russia were to greatly expand its tanker fleet, that could be a sign that it intends to conduct more out-of-area operations.

Maritime resupply is even more challenged, which is particularly problematic for Russia, given that 80 to 90 percent of its sustainment deliveries to Syria are by sea.<sup>32</sup> Russia currently has no corollary to the U.S. Military Sealift Command. To support even the small force of 3,000 to 5,000 personnel in Syria (with a mixture of air and ground vehicles), Russia has had to purchase four vessels to augment its naval transport and merchant marine. Russian leaders appear to have recognized this deficiency. In 2018, Moscow began simplifying the legal requirements to contract with commercial shipping companies to transport military cargo by sea and probably also by air.<sup>33</sup>

### **Evolving Power-Projection Forces**

The traditional “triad” of Russia’s power projection forces includes the VDV, Naval Infantry, and Special Forces (Spetsnaz). Over the past ten years, Russia has augmented the traditional triad to include a new group of special forces (who operate in ways comparable with U.S. Army Delta Force or Navy SEALs), intelligence operatives, and private military contractors, such as the Wagner group.<sup>34</sup> The following sections offer details about the full spectrum of evolving Russian intervention forces—the VDV, Navy, special forces, private military contractors, and Ground Forces—and about Russia’s procurement priorities for these forces.

### **VDV Trending Heavier Over Time**

The VDV is Russia’s traditional first responder and insertion force. Its mission emphasizes rapid reaction and deployment within hours

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<sup>31</sup> “The Tankers Will Not Takeoff. The Ministry of Defense Has Rejected the Idea of Transforming Il-96-400T Cargo Aircraft into Flying Tanker Aircraft,” *Izvestia*, May 4, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Shepovalenko, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> “Ministry of Defense to Offer Private Carriers ‘Stealth Contracts:’ Transport Companies Will Ship Military Cargoes Expeditiously and Under Conditions of Secrecy,” *Izvestia*, February 27, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Fainberg, *Russian Spetsnaz, Contractors and Volunteers in the Syrian Conflict*, IFRI NEI Visions, No. 105, December 21, 2017.

or days of an order. Russia has around 45,000 VDV soldiers, a growth of 25 percent since 2012.<sup>35</sup> The VDV is divided into two categories with different mission sets. The air assault (*desantno-shturmovye*) units, which make up the vast majority of the VDV order of battle, are intended to deploy to airfields with their equipment and to prepare for follow-on ground forces. The paratroopers (*parashutno-desantnye*) are intended to drop in behind enemy lines with their kits to rapidly secure the infrastructure required for subsequent operations. Given the nature of tasks the VDV is required to execute, VDV troops have traditionally relied on light equipment with relatively limited protection and firepower. Mobility and speed are the distinguishing factors of the force. The BMD-2, the airborne version of the infantry fighting vehicle, weighs only eight tons. Despite its entry into the force in 1985, this vehicle still made up 90 percent of the primary fighting vehicles in the VDV inventory as of 2015. Similarly, the eight-ton BTR-D armored personnel carrier had, until recently, been the primary transport vehicle for the airborne.

Consistent with Russia's threat perceptions that conflicts along its borders have the potential to escalate quickly, the General Staff and VDV leadership have decided that more-rapidly available firepower and protection will be required. The VDV has recently begun acquiring more-heavily armored equipment, and this heavy armor comes with a significant trade-off for mobility and expeditionary deployment. Heavier and larger equipment is *less* suitable for out-of-area contingencies, as this equipment is more difficult and costly to transport by sea or air. If a large percentage of the VDV transitions to heavier armored equipment, this would suggest that Moscow sees a more valuable role for the VDV in conflicts on its borders rather than in out-of-area operations. The VDV is replacing the lighter BMD-2 and BTR-D with the BMD-4M and the BTR-MDM, respectively. Each of these new vehicles weighs approximately 66 percent more than its predecessor.<sup>36</sup> There are rumored plans for the VDV to receive up to 1,500

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<sup>35</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2012*, Vol. 112, London: Routledge, 2012; IISS, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> The BMD-4M boasts a 100-mm cannon and is similar in weight to the BTR-MDM; each is over 13 tons.



BMD-4Ms and 2,500 BTR-MDMs as part of SAP-2027.<sup>37</sup> Some air-assault units are also being reinforced with tank companies. As of 2017, there were six new tank companies, or a total of 60 T-72B3 tanks, in the VDV, and these numbers could be increased for tank battalions.<sup>38</sup> Similar to the Ground Forces, the VDV has added new electronic warfare and UAV companies across the force for jamming, surveillance, and protection missions, although there is currently little additional information on these units.

The additional VDV weight would not be a prohibitive issue for out-of-area operations as long as there were a commensurate increase in the inventory of air lift or sea lift. However, as noted previously, the number of available VTA aircraft is extremely limited. In 2010, the VDV commander, Col. Gen. Vladimir Shamanov, stated that the VTA could support one airborne regiment and that there were plans to support one additional division.<sup>39</sup> There were 293 VTA aircraft at the time that Shamanov made this statement in 2010. As of 2018, the total number of VTA aircraft is reported to be between 176 and 270.<sup>40</sup> In sum, the VDV are getting considerably heavier, and there has not been a corresponding increase in VTA aircraft to move the heavier force.

## **Navy**

The Russian Navy's contribution to expeditionary operations is based on its limited sea lift, escort capability, and Naval Infantry Forces. Expeditionary warfare is a core component of Russia's submarine force. Naval Infantry troops currently provide base security for Russian facili-

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<sup>37</sup> Connolly and Boulègue, 2018, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> These new companies are three tank companies in the Western MD (WMD) and Southern MD (SMD) and three tank companies in the Eastern MD (EMD) and CMD (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 56).

<sup>39</sup> Il'ya Kramnik, "Vladimir Shamanov: VDV Rossii gotovy k resheniyu boevykh zadach," RIA Novosti, August 2, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> "On the Issue of the Present Condition of Russian Military-Transport Aviation," *Ekspert vooruzhenii*, 2017; IISS, 2018.

ties in Syria, and between 80 and 90 percent of logistical deliveries to Syria are by sea.<sup>41</sup>

The Navy surface fleet faces structural limitations that will constrain Russia's out-of-area capabilities in the long term.<sup>42</sup> The Defense Intelligence Agency notes that the Russian Navy is one-sixth to one-quarter of peak Soviet power.<sup>43</sup> Russia does not maintain a sizeable "blue-water navy" made of large surface combatants or aircraft carriers, although it does maintain a world-class submarine fleet. There is no schedule to expand the blue-water surface Navy with new, large surface combatants, which Russia would need for sustained expeditionary operations.<sup>44</sup> Larger combatants (such as heavy destroyers and aircraft carriers), which would be best for a blue-water navy and for defending Russian bases or interests abroad, have been postponed indefinitely. The Navy is instead prioritizing its submarine forces and smaller littoral combat ships, such as Gorshkov- and Grigorovich-class frigates, armed with long-range precision-guided munitions.<sup>45</sup> As Gorenburg notes, "the key takeaway is that the Russian Navy is looking to increase the size of its smaller ships in order to increase their armament and endurance, while reducing costs by indefinitely postponing the procurement of larger ships, such as destroyers, amphibious assault ships, and aircraft carriers."<sup>46</sup> Russia is prioritizing ballistic missile and attack submarines: Borei-class SSBNs, Yasen-class and their successor Husky-

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<sup>41</sup> Shepovalenko, 2016, p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> The Russian naval industry has been beset by internal delays in shipbuilding that have been compounded by international sanctions. The Russian Navy enjoyed the highest funding in SAP 2020, but the Navy's share of the procurement pie in SAP 2027 is projected to be roughly half of what it was (4.7 trillion rubles in SAP 2020 versus 2.6 trillion rubles in SAP 2027) (Gorenburg, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017, p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> Gorenburg, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> "Russia's Armaments Program to Attach Priority to Missile Ships, Nuclear Subs," TASS, November 29, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Gorenburg, 2017; Alexandra Dzhordzhevich and Ivan Safronov, "U trillionov est' dva soyuznika—armiya i flot," *Kommersant*, December 18, 2017; Connolly and Boulègue, 2018.

class 5th-generation nuclear attack submarines, and other modernizations of Kilo- and Oscar-class submarines.

Russian carrier aviation is not a reliable tool of extra-regional power projection. Russia's sole aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, sailed on its first-ever combat cruise to Syria in 2016, where it lost two combat aircraft during landing operations. Its aircraft launched only 35 percent of their 420 sorties from the *Kuznetsov*, the remainder having been launched from Hmeymim Air Base in Syria.<sup>47</sup> Despite its troubled voyage, the *Kuznetsov* was approved for a \$397-million, ten-year service life extension.<sup>48</sup> Russia has not abandoned its long-term desires to build aircraft carriers again one day. However, given budget constraints, Russia's decision to retain the *Kuznetsov* appears to be more about retaining a visible symbol of great-power status and keeping carrier production and maintenance lines and carrier aviation viable rather than enhancing operational capability.

### ***Special Forces and Private Military Contractors***

In recent years, Russia has increasingly used a new combination of special forces, intelligence operatives, and newly created Private Military Companies (PMC) for out-of-area activity or operations. In 2014, Russia created a new elite group, the Special Operations Command (KSO). These forces are meant to operate alone and deep behind enemy lines, as they have done in Syria. Russia still maintains around 17,000 Spetsnaz troops in the Army, Navy, and VDV. Between 20 and 30 percent of these Spetsnaz forces are conscripts, who are primarily assigned to operate with their parent units.<sup>49</sup>

There are multiple Russian PMCs operating outside Russia at present, the most well known of which is the Wagner group. Since Russia began continuous operations abroad in Ukraine and Syria, PMC activity has increased significantly. PMCs are illegal in Russia,

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<sup>47</sup> Anton Lavrov, *The Russia Air Campaign in Syria: A Preliminary Analysis*, Arlington, Va.: CNA Analysis and Solutions, June 2018.

<sup>48</sup> "Dolgi bol'nichnyi: kogda vernetsya 'Admiral Kuznetsov,'" *Gazeta.ru*, April 23, 2018; "Pokhod «Admirala Kuznetsova» oboshelsya byudzhetu bolee chem v 7,5 mlrd rub.," *RBC*, February 7, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Galeotti, 2017a, p. 54.

so these PMCs operate in the shadows but with apparent support from entities within the state. The Wagner group's training area is reportedly colocated with the 10th Special Forces Brigade of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU).<sup>50</sup> Russian PMCs are reported to have been active in Ukraine, Syria, the Central African Republic, and Sudan.<sup>51</sup> PMCs have allowed the Ministry of Defense to avoid deploying uniformed forces in delicate situations abroad, when doing so would increase political risk.

### **Ground Forces**

Russian Ground Forces are not designed for expeditionary combat operations but do factor prominently in regional power projection contingencies. During the early stages of the New Look defense reforms, after all divisions were disbanded and reformed into smaller brigades, Russian military leaders considered a concept of heavy, medium, and light brigades. Such a mixed posture could have provided enough modularity for out-of-area contingencies. However, the concept was rejected, as light units never emerged and heavy divisions were reintroduced in 2013. Likewise, Russian artillery units are growing larger and heavier over time, with improved range, precision, and lethality but less mobility. As Connolly and Boulègue note, Russia's artillery procurement strategy to 2027 appears to expand the "range of combat missions which artillery capabilities can handle, and to boost firepower among combined-arms divisions and brigades."<sup>52</sup> Russia will replace most towed artillery with self-propelled artillery, including the Uragan-M1 and Tornado-S multiple rocket launcher system (MRLS), and upgrade the capabilities of the 2S35 *Koalitsiya-SV*, the 2S7M *Malka*, and the 2S4 *Tulpan*, along with the *Smerch* and *Tornado-S* MRLSs. As of 2017, Russia had created three artillery brigades in the Western Military District and SMD.

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<sup>50</sup> Sergey Sukhanin, "‘Continuing War by Other Means’: The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East," blog post, Jamestown Foundation, July 13, 2018b.

<sup>51</sup> Sergey Sukhanin, "Beyond Syria and Ukraine: Wagner PMC Expands Its Operations to Africa," Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 65, April 30, 2018a.

<sup>52</sup> Connolly and Boulègue, 2018, p. 25.

### **C4ISR**

Russia's C4ISR procurement priorities to 2025, such as continued investment and integration of UAVs into the force, could assist with both regional and out-of-area operations. The Ministry of Defense claims it has received over 1,800 UAVs from 2012 to 2018, including the Eleron, Orlan-10, Zastava, and Forpost UAVs.<sup>53</sup> Russia is working on fielding long-range and strike-capable UAVs by 2025.<sup>54</sup> Moscow is improving its reconnaissance strike capability by integrating data from UAVs; space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; Special Forces; and AWACS (Tu-214R, IL-20M, and IL-22); this will allow the military to improve target identification and development, strike accuracy, and battle damage assessment.<sup>55</sup> Russia maintains the world's third-largest number of operational satellites in space, which will assist out-of-area operations. Moscow will also update its space constellation with upgraded navigation satellites, a new space-based ballistic missile early warning constellation by 2022, a bolstered military communications constellation, and upgraded imagery satellites by 2024—all of which could assist out-of-area operations.<sup>56</sup>

## **Sustainability**

Russia is taking steps to gain greater overseas access but faces structural challenges with sustainability outside the boundaries of the former Soviet Union. These sustainability factors will constrain Moscow's capacity to support multiple squadrons or brigades in out-of-area operations beyond the current levels in Syria. Russia's limited number

<sup>53</sup> "Russian Army Gains Over 1,500 Modern Drones in 4 Years—Defense Ministry," 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Vladimir Tuchkov, "Tyazhelyi udarnyi dron 'Zenitsa', on zhe—'Al'tair'," *Svobodnaya Pressa*, June 11, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Radin, Lynn E. Davis, Edward Geist, Eugeniu Han, Dara Massicot, Matthew Povlock, Clint Reach, Scott Boston, Samuel Charap, William Mackenzie, Katya Migacheva, Teevor Johnston, and Austin Long, *The Future of the Russian Military: Russia's Ground Combat Capabilities and Implications for U.S.-Russia Competition*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3099-A, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Radin et al., 2019.

of overseas bases and logistical hubs represent a difficult constraint to overcome, despite Moscow’s progress in securing simplified port or airfield access agreements in Africa, Asia, and Central America since 2014. Russia faces fewer sustainment challenges for regional power projection in neighboring states, where Russian forces can gain access to ground and rail transportation and to robust logistical support.

Russia maintains a light permanent military footprint beyond the boundaries of the former Soviet Union. Its only out-of-area bases are in Syria, and those have emerged only since the 2015 intervention began. Since 2014, Moscow has signed—or is currently negotiating for—port and airfield access agreements with seven nations in eastern Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, the eastern Mediterranean, and Central America (see Table 7.4). These access agreements could simplify airfield or port visitations for out-of-area deployments. Such efforts suggest that Russia

**Table 7.4**  
**Russian Out-of-Area Bases and Access Agreements, as of 2018**

Type	Country	Details	Year Signed
Base	Syria	Naval facility	Soviet-era
		Air base	2016
Port or airfield access agreements	Burma	Port access	2018
	Cyprus	Logistics and port access	2015
	Egypt	Logistics and access	2017
	Eritrea	Port access	2018
	Mozambique	Port access	2018
	Nicaragua	Port access	2015
	Seychelles	Logistics and port access	2018
	Venezuela	Port access	2019
	Vietnam	Port access	2014

NOTE: This table does not include Russian bases or facilities in former Soviet countries; data compiled by authors.

plans to make these types of out-of-area visits in the future; however, as noted previously, Moscow's blue-water surface naval force posture will be limited over the next decade.

The access negotiation process appears to have accelerated around 2014, when Defense Minister Shoigu surprisingly announced that Russia planned to greatly expand its military presence beyond its immediate neighborhood, which would be inconsistent with Russia's stated strategy. Potential partner countries on the list included Vietnam, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, and Singapore. Within a few weeks of Shoigu's remarks, Foreign Minister Lavrov clarified: "We have no plans to create military or naval bases abroad."<sup>57</sup> As events played out in the months and years following Shoigu's comment, basing agreements did not materialize, for various reasons; for example, the constitution of Nicaragua forbids the permanent presence of foreign militaries, and Vietnam and Venezuela explicitly stated that they have no intention of allowing a foreign military to establish a permanent base on their territory. In practice, there has been a much more limited expansion of Russian military presence abroad than what was initially put forward by Shoigu.

Russia stations around 2 to 3 percent of its authorized active-duty manpower abroad (including in the former Soviet region)—i.e., around 20,000 to 30,000 of one million active duty personnel, the vast majority of whom are in the former Soviet region.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, the U.S. military maintains around 13 percent of its total active duty personnel overseas (169,790 personnel as of 2018).<sup>59</sup>

### ***Interoperability with Partners***

Russia does not have a robust group of partners or allies with militaries capable of contributing to its out-of-area operations. The inability to outsource some mission requirements to coalition partners places all

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<sup>57</sup> Sharon Uranie, "Sergrey Lavrov—Russia Has No Plans for Seychelles Military Base," Seychelles News Agency, April 3, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Ekaterina Zgirovskaya, "Mirovov Pristutstvie," *Gazeta.ru*, December 16, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Military and Civilian Personnel by Service/Agency by State/Country for March 2018," data set, March 31, 2018.

of the operational burden on fledgling Russian expeditionary capabilities. Although CSTO members have a high degree of interoperability among their militaries thanks to their common Russian-origin equipment, shared early-warning and air-defense networks, and mutual defense agreements, Russia's allies possess little to no expeditionary capacity of their own, and therefore are unable to provide meaningful military assistance for Moscow's out-of-area operations.<sup>60</sup> In Syria, Russia has demonstrated that it can create coalitions on an ad hoc basis, working closely with the Syrian military and its Iranian allies to provide ground support for Moscow's air campaign. But if Russia were to conduct another out-of-area operation in a different country, it would need to build such a coalition largely from scratch.

## Conclusions

Russia's resource decisions do not suggest that it is deliberately planning to create a military oriented toward large- or medium-scale expeditionary operations, in line with its stated strategy. Our analysis of required mobility, readiness, and sustainment capabilities indicates that key pillars of a global expeditionary force are fragile or missing altogether: Russia has no out-of-area bases except in Syria, its strategic lift capabilities to 2025 and beyond are not sufficient to meet territorial defense needs while also supporting large expeditionary operations, its mixed manning system is poorly suited to expeditionary missions, procurement to 2027 is trending toward heavier equipment, and it has no allies with significant organic abilities to contribute to out-of-area operations. Furthermore, Russia is not reconstituting a global basing network, either because it is not seeking basing arrangements with prospective host nations or because such prospective hosts reject its proposals. Instead, Moscow continues to pursue lower-profile access agreements with countries in eastern Africa, South Asia, and Latin America for influence, peacetime operations, or other measures short of war. These agreements are not legally guaranteed arrangements that

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<sup>60</sup> IISS, 2018.



can support combat operations abroad. Russia will struggle to support medium-scale, out-of-area, or contested-entry operations for conflicts that require a primary deployment route by sea or air. Moscow is likely to face challenges to support a force of more than 5,000 personnel abroad or in a contested-entry environment.

As evidenced by Russia's ongoing operation in Syria, structural issues will not preclude Russia from extraregional power projection in small, niche applications of force in uncontested areas where its national security interests are at stake. The Russian military is capable of sustaining a limited, if not makeshift, expeditionary capability in select regions. This modest expeditionary capability, marked by limited objectives and with limited resources, appears consistent with a still-developing concept called the *strategy of limited action*.<sup>61</sup> The strategy of limited action could be an emerging conceptual basis for expeditionary operations planning in the future. Russia has demonstrated the ability to flexibly tailor its operations around the many military and political limitations it faces. Moscow is maintaining a limited suite of expeditionary assets composed of special forces, intelligence operatives, and PMCs for out-of-area contingencies. These light-footprint forces allow Moscow to operate globally with reduced political risk and logistical costs.

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<sup>61</sup> Gerasimov, 2019. A definition of the term offered in a Russian reference reads, "The way of conducting war and operations with limited goals, with the deliberate spread of military actions on strictly defined territories, using only a part of military potential and only certain groups of armed forces, selectively striking a certain number of selected objects, targets and groups of troops (forces) of the enemy. It is used in conditions when there is no need to use the entire military power of the state to achieve the goals set, or if one side or the other seeks to avoid the enemy's dangerous large-scale actions. At the same time, military actions are of a limited nature; they are carried out on a smaller scale, mainly by launching fire strikes and conducting joint air, anti-air, front-line, army and divisional operations" (Rogozin, 2017).



## Strategy Element: Selective Cooperation and Selective Pushback with the West

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### Stated Strategy

Russia's strategic documents highlight a litany of concerns about, and objections to, Western foreign policy behaviors of recent years. These concerns include alleged interference in Russia's domestic politics, regime change operations in the Middle East and beyond, abuse of the international economic system to gain unfair advantage, and moving NATO forces and infrastructure closer to Russia's borders. Both directly and indirectly, Moscow has made clear its intentions to force the West to scale back its ambitions and to counter the elements of Western foreign policy that it considers particularly problematic.

However, Russia has also contended that while it vigorously objects to numerous Western behaviors, it seeks cooperation with the West and Western institutions on matters of mutual interest. According to the Foreign Policy Concept, Russia is "interested in building constructive, stable, and predictable cooperation with the countries of the EU on the principles of equality and mutual respect of interests."<sup>1</sup> The document states similar goals vis-à-vis the EU and NATO (as organizations) and the United States.

Russian leaders regularly call for cooperation with the West on issues of shared interests. In his 2015 speech to the UN General Assembly, when he announced the imminent start of Russia's interven-

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<sup>1</sup> President of Russia, 2016b.

tion in Syria—a move widely seen as hostile to the West and Western objectives—Putin called for a “wide international counterterrorism coalition” comparable with the “anti-Hitler” coalition of World War II; in other words, a reincarnation of the Soviet Union’s alliance with the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, Russia’s stated strategy entails forceful pushback when the West crosses a Russian red line and constructive cooperation on other issues.

Many Western policymakers, analysts, and scholars believe that Russia’s real objectives vis-à-vis the West differ dramatically from Moscow’s official pronouncements. These observers suggest that Russia’s declared desire for cooperation is disingenuous and that Russia has far-more-ambitious objectives in terms of pushing back against the West. For example, the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy states that “Russia want[s] to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests” and that Russia seeks to “weaken U.S. influence in the world and divide [it] from [its] allies and partners” by “using information tools in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of democracies.”<sup>3</sup> It goes on to say that Russia has used “subversive measures” in an effort to “weaken European institutions and governments.”<sup>4</sup> The U.S. intelligence community’s assessment of Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election finds that the meddling was driven by “Moscow’s long-standing desire to undermine the U.S.-led liberal democratic order.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, a 2018 U.S. criminal indictment states that the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a group carrying out some of the interference efforts in the 2016 election, was acting on the Russian government’s “strategic goal to sow discord in the U.S. political system.”<sup>6</sup> As Daniel

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<sup>2</sup> President of Russia, “70-ya sessiya General’noi Assamblei OON,” webpage, 2015c.

<sup>3</sup> President of the United States, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C.: White House, December 2017, pp. 14, 25.

<sup>4</sup> President of the United States, 2017, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections*, Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, ICA 2017-01D, January 6, 2017, p. ii.

<sup>6</sup> Indictment, *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency*, Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF (D.D.C. Feb. 16, 2018), p. 4.

Jones, a former Federal Bureau of Investigation analyst, put it, “They’re working to destroy everything that was built post-World War II.”<sup>7</sup>

European policymakers and analysts have made similar claims. In remarks in late 2017, British then–Prime Minister Theresa May criticized Moscow for “weaponiz[ing] information” in an effort to “sow discord in the West and undermine our institutions.”<sup>8</sup> In an open letter to Federica Mogherini, then the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, several European security experts stated that recent Russian disinformation campaigns are “aimed at destabilizing our societies, meddling in our elections and referendums, misleading our political leaders and breaking up the EU unity by supporting those who want to destroy it.”<sup>9</sup>

These statements suggest that Russia, in addition to furthering its foreign policy interests and pushing back on what it sees as the West’s overreach, pursues the following objectives:

- to undermine the EU and NATO by weakening their political cohesion (including by supporting referenda, parties, and candidates that are inimical to these institutions)
- to undermine the legitimacy of Western democracies
- to weaken Western polities by sowing discord.

These are far-more-expansive aims than Russia claims for itself. If they truly reflect Russian objectives, that would have significant consequences for U.S. national interests, suggesting a much more significant Russian challenge. The narrative about Russia’s desire to undermine Western institutions and societies has become so prominent that the Kremlin has been forced to respond to it. In June 2018, Putin said the following in response to an Austrian journalist’s query on the subject:

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<sup>7</sup> Matt Apuzzo and Adam Satariano, “Russia Is Targeting Europe’s Elections. So Are Far-Right Copycats,” *New York Times*, May 12, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Scott Neuman, “Russia Using Disinformation to ‘Sow Discord in West,’ Britain’s Prime Minister Says,” National Public Radio, November 14, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Jakub Janda, coordinator, “Open Letter of European Security Experts to Federica Mogherini: Please Start Taking the Russian Disinformation Threat Seriously!” webpage, European Values, 2017.

[It is] not our aim to divide anything or anybody in Europe. On the contrary, we want to see a united and prosperous European Union, because the European Union is our biggest trade and economic partner. The more problems there are within the European Union, the greater the risks and uncertainties for us . . . . We keep 40 percent of our gold and currency reserves in the euro. Why should we undermine all of this?<sup>10</sup>

On the specific question of why Russia seems to support or at least cooperate more with anti-EU parties, Putin said that “we proceed from purely pragmatic considerations. We seek to cooperate with those who publicly declare that they are ready and willing to cooperate with us.”<sup>11</sup>

Of course, there are incentives for the Russian government to use doctrinal documents, public remarks, and other written and oral statements as a means of communicating a potentially false narrative about its objectives. Given that several Russian-sponsored messaging campaigns in recent years have, in fact, been false, we have good reason not to take the Kremlin at its word. Moreover, if Russia’s objectives are as hostile as many in the West allege, Moscow could simply avoid declaring them openly; states might seek to avoid the consequences of framing their own intentions as aggressive. However, Western policymakers, analysts, and scholars are subject to their own biases in their interpretations of Russian objectives, and those biases could distort their assessments.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, much of the recent Western analysis seems to conflate the *effect* of Russia’s actions (in this case, increased discord) with the original intention behind those actions. In other words, Moscow is believed to be seeking chaos for the sake of chaos because its actions had that effect. However, in international politics, outcomes often have little to do with intentions.<sup>13</sup> It could be that Russia seeks to sow discord as a means of achieving its declared objectives of changing Western policy.

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<sup>10</sup> President of Russia, “Interv’yu avstriiskomu telekanalu ORF,” webpage, June 4, 2018b.

<sup>11</sup> President of Russia, 2018b.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of how biases affect how policymakers perceive adversary intentions and capabilities, see Jervis, 1976.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.

In other words, rather than pursuing a Cold War–like systematic plan for undermining Western countries *as a goal in itself*, Moscow could be playing on divisions to achieve a change in Western behavior. Sowing division thus might be something of an intermediate goal for achieving a different long-term objective.

This chapter begins by outlining our analytical approach. We develop a framework for distinguishing between different propositions regarding Russian objectives by generating a set of expected behaviors consistent with each. We then apply the framework to two categories of Russian government behaviors vis-à-vis the West over the period under examination (2012–2018): Russia’s cooperation with Western countries and Russia’s interference in Western countries. Finally, we assess what the results tell us about the extent to which Russia’s actions match its stated strategy.

## Evaluation Method

In this chapter, we focus on two categories of observable actions that could be used to assess Russia’s goals with respect to the West: the nature of Russia’s cooperation with the West and the nature of its interference in Western domestic politics. We suggest an illustrative analytical framework to understand whether Russian behavior is most consistent with Russia’s stated objectives, a more aggressive characterization of Russian objectives, or a third explanation in between these two extremes. If Russia were seeking to sow discord, undermine Western institutions, and weaken the underpinnings of societies as ends in themselves, it would likely pursue these aims differently than if it were seeking only to change specific Western foreign policies while selectively cooperating or using divisions for that purpose. Therefore, we begin by identifying what Russian behavior would look like under the three different visions.

Analytically, all three visions seem to be able to account for some degree of Russian cooperation with Western countries. If Russia’s stated strategy of selective cooperation were accurately reflected in its actions, Moscow would seek cooperation on shared interests and demonstrate a willingness to engage meaningfully with its partners and compromise

to reach agreement. If it were using discord as a means to an end, its actions would be similar. If Russia aimed to weaken the West, Moscow could pursue cooperation for narrowly self-interested reasons or as a smokescreen to confuse Western partners about its intentions. Equally, this understanding of Russian objectives could also account for outright Russian refusal to negotiate or sign agreements, even on favorable terms, or simply pursuit of outcomes without engaging the West as a partner when it has the option to do so. Russia might take symbolic steps that appear cooperative on the surface, such as agreeing to attend diplomatic meetings or suggesting terms it knows the West would reject.

The extent and nature of Russian interference in the domestic politics of Western countries would also vary depending on Russia's objectives. We assume that all interference is, in one way or another, aimed at affecting the politics or policies of another state. Therefore, it would be consistent with Russia's stated strategy to use information campaigns to push for changes in Western foreign policies that it finds threatening or problematic. That would mean it would not engage in efforts that would damage the West without a plausible connection to clear foreign policy goals. If, in contrast to its stated strategy, Russia sought to sow discord for the purpose of achieving policy shifts, or if its goal were to weaken the West or to delegitimize Western democracies, we would expect Russian interference that would seek to sow societal discord outside the context of any political process, including elections, that could be related to Russian interests. This might mean, for example, provocative social media posts on both sides of domestic issues to heighten distrust between those who already have disagreements.

Table 8.1 summarizes the different expected behaviors associated with the alternative hypothesized Russian approaches to the West. These are ideal-type distinctions and should be treated as analytical categories rather than accurate representations of the practices of complex, bureaucratic nation-states that rarely pursue one objective simultaneously.

The challenge with assessing the competing understandings of Russian objectives is falsifiability. The nature of cooperative efforts can only be used to determine objectives if we observe no attempts at meaningful cooperation; in that case, the evidence would support the most-



**Table 8.1**  
**Behaviors Consistent with Alternative Russian Approaches to the West**

Behavior	Approach: Weaken Western Societies and Institutions	Approach: Selective Cooperation, Weakening West to Change Its Behavior	Approach: Selective Cooperation and Selective Pushback
Cooperation with the West	No meaningful cooperation, or meaningful cooperation on shared interests	Meaningful cooperation on shared interests	Meaningful cooperation on shared interests
Interference in Western domestic politics	Efforts to sow societal discord with no plausible foreign policy objective	Efforts to sow societal discord with no plausible foreign policy objective	Interference related to specific foreign policy issues or in support of pro- Russian politicians

aggressive interpretation of Russian objectives toward the West. Equally, only if interference efforts are limited to information campaigns could we use it to rule out alternatives; in that case, Russia’s stated objectives would be supported. But we can say with certainty that Russia *did* attempt cooperation during the period under examination, and that it *did* engage in more than mere information campaigns. Therefore, the evidence presented in this chapter can only rule out one of the three options (the stated strategy); it cannot tell us definitively which of the other two interpretations of Russia’s intentions are accurate.

**Russia’s Cooperation with the West**

Because of resource limitations, we were unable to document comprehensively or code all relevant events in Russia-West relations in the period under consideration. Instead, we examined several illustrative cases of Russia’s cooperation with the West and attempted to assess whether the cooperation was purely superficial or involved substantive, meaningful measures. We divided our examination by chronological time periods: from 2012 to 2014 (pre-Ukraine crisis) and from 2014 to 2018 (post-Ukraine crisis).

## 2012 to 2014

Russia's relations with the West have been strained throughout the period under investigation. However, until 2014, Russia had engaged in fairly comprehensive cooperation with several Western countries on a wide variety of issues.

At the senior political level, there was regular substantive engagement that resulted in several examples of substantive cooperation. At the 2013 Group of Eight (G-8) meeting, for instance, U.S. President Barack Obama and Putin agreed to three joint statements: on counterterrorism cooperation; on the creation of cyber confidence-building measures; and on "Enhanced Bilateral Engagement," which set out an agenda for bilateral relations and contacts, including plans for a U.S.-Russia summit in Moscow.<sup>14</sup> In early 2014, Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov attended the EU-Russia Summit, where the two sides released a joint statement on combatting terrorism.<sup>15</sup>

There were also regular high-level exchanges that were less substantive but nonetheless suggested that Russia was seeking enhanced cooperation. For example, shortly after returning to the presidency in 2012, Putin visited France and Germany. In 2013, he made another visit to Germany, where he opened the Hanover Economic Forum. There were biannual presidential-level EU-Russia summits before 2014. A 2+2 meeting between the U.S. Secretaries of Defense and State and their Russian counterparts took place in the United States in 2013.

Substantive cooperation in the defense and security areas also occurred in this period. Russia had relatively robust cooperation on defense and security issues with the United States, NATO, the EU, and other Western countries and organizations at several levels. In Afghanistan, Russia aided the NATO effort to bring an end to the conflict and

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<sup>14</sup> "Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Cooperation in Countering Terrorism," June 17, 2013; "Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Enhanced Bilateral Engagement," June 17, 2013; "Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on a New Field of Cooperation in Confidence Building," June 17, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Council of the European Union, "Joint EU-Russia Statement on Combatting Terrorism," Brussels, Belgium, January 28, 2014.

cooperated in several ways. For example, NATO countries and Russia jointly provided counternarcotics training to Afghan police.<sup>16</sup> A senior NATO official added that Russia had “facilitated NATO’s mandate [in Afghanistan] by allowing transit through its territory, training helicopter technicians and providing helicopter spare parts at preferential prices.”<sup>17</sup>

Another example of meaningful cooperation occurred when the United States and Russia cooperated to destroy the vast majority of chemical weapons under the control of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in 2013. NATO and Russia also cooperated in such areas as counterpiracy, joint monitoring of civilian aircraft, and submarine-rescue exercises.<sup>18</sup> Russia worked with the EU in areas of border security and organized crime.<sup>19</sup> Bilateral cooperation between the U.S. and Russian militaries also continued until 2014. Under the auspices of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission Defense Relations Working Group, numerous meetings were held at various levels from 2012 to 2013.<sup>20</sup> Dozens of defense cooperation initiatives took place at the working level. For example, in 2012, Russian airborne troops participated in a joint exercise with U.S. troops in Fort Carson, Colorado, the first time such a joint exercise took place on American soil.<sup>21</sup>

Outside the defense and security area, Russia pursued a relatively broad cooperative agenda with the West. The EU-Russia relationship featured practical cooperation on energy, the environment, education, technology, and migration.<sup>22</sup> Under the framework of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, the United States and

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<sup>16</sup> NATO, “NATO-Russia Counter-Narcotics Training Reaches Milestone,” webpage, April 19, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Radoslava Stefanova, “A Personal Take on NATO-Russia Relations,” blog post, *NATO Review*, June 13, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> NATO, “NATO-Russia Relations: The Background,” 2017.

<sup>19</sup> “The European Union and the Russian Federation,” Delegation of the European Union to Russia, webpage, May 30, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, *2013 Joint Annual Report*, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> “First Ever Joint Russian-U.S. Military Training on American Territory,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, May 16, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> “The European Union and the Russian Federation,” 2019.

Russia likewise pursued cooperation across a wide variety of sectors, from agriculture to health to business development. For the Commission's work in the area of science and technology, the United States and Russia "forged university-to-university and innovation partnerships and launched extensive nuclear and energy research agreements" from May 2012 to December 2013.<sup>23</sup>

While there was meaningful cooperation between the two sides in this period, Russia also began to pursue its interests more vigorously in areas where Western policies were perceived to be encroaching on Russia's strategic interests. In 2012, Russia ordered the U.S. Agency for International Development to cease operations because of alleged meddling in Russian domestic politics.<sup>24</sup> The following year, Russia refused U.S. proposals to consider further nuclear reduction talks until it received a legally binding guarantee on missile defense.<sup>25</sup> Also in 2013, Russia granted asylum to former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden—who revealed numerous classified U.S. programs—and created a diplomatic incident by televising the arrest of an alleged U.S. spy who was subsequently expelled from Russia.<sup>26</sup>

## 2014 to 2018

As a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the EU and the United States cut off most cooperation with Moscow. The situation has since deteriorated as a result of several Russian actions, including support for separatist forces in eastern Ukraine; the shootdown of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over the Donbas region; interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election; support for al-Assad following multiple suspected chemical weapons attacks against civilians in Syria; and the poisoning of the former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England, with a banned nerve agent. Each of these actions

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<sup>23</sup> U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> "Russia Expels USAID Development Agency," BBC News, September 12, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Tom Z. Collina, "Russia, U.S. Trade Missile Defense Offers," blog post, Arms Control Association, June 3, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> David M. Herszenhorn and Ellen Barry, "From Russia, with Wig: American Spy Suspect Is Ejected," *New York Times*, May 14, 2013.

has provoked responses from the West that have prompted counteractions from Russia.

Despite this backdrop, engagement and limited cooperation between Russia and the West have continued, albeit at a much-reduced level. Nor has Russia shied from proposing potential areas for cooperation in which it sees its interests overlapping with those of its Western partners.

From 2016 to 2018, there were eight NATO-Russia Council (NRC) meetings. Within the framework of the NRC, Russia has offered numerous proposals for cooperation. In 2016, for example, Russia proposed to activate transponders on aircraft flying in the Baltic region in a response to NATO criticism, which ultimately led to a Finnish-led Expert Group on Baltic Sea Air Safety.<sup>27</sup> According to NATO, work in this area has been “promising.”<sup>28</sup> There are also ongoing deconfliction efforts between the United States and Russia to avoid problematic incidents in Syria.

Moscow has consistently sought even greater cooperation. In the early days of the Trump administration, Russia extended a proposal offering cooperation on a whole host of issues, from North Korea to Ukraine, and the restoration of military-to-military contacts.<sup>29</sup> Following U.S. accusations of interference in the presidential election, Russia proposed a negotiation on a noninterference agreement.<sup>30</sup> On several occasions, senior Russian officials have proposed joint efforts to combat terrorism in Syria (and beyond) and complained that Washington is

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<sup>27</sup> Robin Emmott, “Russia Offers to Fly Warplanes More Safely over Baltics,” Reuters, July 13, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> NATO, “NATO-Russia Relations: The Facts,” webpage, last updated August 9, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> John Hudson, “Russia Sought a Broad Reset with Trump, Secret Document Shows,” *BuzzFeed News*, September 12, 2017a. According to Lavrov, Russia stands behind this proposal, which was delivered through diplomatic channels but leaked to the press. See Sergei Lavrov, “Zaryazhennost’ na rusofobiyu bespretsedentna,” *Kommersant*, January 22, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> John Hudson, “NO DEAL: How Secret Talks with Russia to Prevent Election Meddling Collapsed,” *BuzzFeed News*, December 8, 2017b; Anatolii Il’in, “Moskva zayavila o gotovnosti vozobnovit’ sotrudnichestve po kiberbezopasnosti s SSHa,” *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, September 29, 2017.

unwilling to do more than “deconfliction.”<sup>31</sup> In 2017, Russia and the United States, following a meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, issued a joint statement on Syria that called for the continuation of deconfliction efforts and reiterated the importance of a political settlement to the conflict.<sup>32</sup> In July 2018, following the Helsinki summit, the Russian Chief of the General Staff sent the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff detailed proposals on Syrian reconstruction and refugee resettlement.<sup>33</sup>

For several reasons, these overtures have been either rebuffed or ignored. Russia, however, seems intent on continuing to make them—so much so that prominent voices in Moscow have questioned the logic of this approach, calling instead for a “time-out” in relations with Washington.<sup>34</sup> Although they might be both substantively unacceptable and politically unpalatable, these offers of cooperation are analytically significant; they are acts of commission. Russia affirmatively chose to seek cooperation with the United States. It could have chosen not to make these offers.

Some maintain that these offers of cooperation are disingenuous and designed to be unacceptable to Washington, and thus a ploy to use the inevitable U.S. rejection to portray the United States as the cause of the problems in U.S.-Russia relations. Although this assertion is consistent with the evidence, it should be noted that the proposition of Russian insincerity has not often been tested by conducting negotiations.

At the same time, Russia has made several aggressive moves against the West since 2014. For example, the number of “close incidents” involving provocative or dangerous actions by Russian aircraft in airspace in and near the Baltic Sea has increased significantly since

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<sup>31</sup> Author’s interview with senior Russian official, Moscow, December 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement by the President of the United States and the President of the Russian Federation,” Washington, D.C., November 11, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Arshad Mohammed and Phil Stewart, “Exclusive: Despite Tensions, Russia Seeks U.S. Help to Rebuild Syria,” Reuters, August 3, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Aleksandr Vysotskii, “Vremya dlya taim-auta,” *Rossiia v Global’noi Politike*, August 28, 2018.

2014, to include alleged violations of Estonian airspace.<sup>35</sup> According to NATO officials, between 2015 and 2016, Russia violated NATO airspace in Turkey in the course of operations in Syria.<sup>36</sup> In 2016, Russia unilaterally suspended cooperation under the U.S.-Russia Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement, citing a host of reasons related as much to geopolitics as to implementation of the agreement.<sup>37</sup> In March 2018, the attempted assassination of the former Russian intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter using a banned nerve agent was attributed to the Russian government by the United Kingdom.<sup>38</sup> There has thus been a clear uptick in assertive Russian actions since the crisis began in Ukraine in February 2014.

### Summary

In sum, Russia has either cooperated with or sought cooperation with the West over the entirety of the period under investigation. The amount of cooperation decreased after 2014, in part because of Western unwillingness to engage following Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine. Russia continued to make substantive offers to cooperate with the West after 2014, although this happened less regularly. At the same time, Moscow began pushing back more vigorously on areas of disagreement and undertaking new assertive measures toward Western countries. Thus, the evidence regarding this element of Russian behavior is consistent with all three explanations of Russian objectives regarding relations with the West.

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Milne and Kathrin Hille, "Russian Air Incursions Rattle Baltic States," *Financial Times*, September 24, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> NATO, "Statement by the NATO Secretary General on Russian Air Space Violation," press release, January 30, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Kingston Reif, "Russia Suspends Plutonium Agreement," blog post, Arms Control Association, November 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Sedwill, letter regarding the Salisbury chemical attack, addressed to Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary-General of NATO, London, UK, April 13, 2018.

## Russia's Interference in the West

Russian efforts to interfere in the domestic politics of Western countries are also indicators of Russian objectives. By *interference*, we mean a state actor's efforts to influence the foreign policymaking, internal affairs, or political cohesion or strength of another state or of another political or military institution to which the perpetrator is not a party.

Although much has been made of recent Russian efforts to meddle in political processes in Western countries, such behavior is relatively typical for great powers historically.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in itself the interference is not proof that Moscow has fundamentally hostile objectives vis-à-vis the West. In other words, certain kinds of interference—such as information campaigns or support for friendly candidates—could be consistent with Russia's declared objectives of selective cooperation and selective pushback with the West. States seeking some level of cooperation with competitors could still seek to influence their competitors' foreign policies to be in line with their interests. However, a state with such objectives would not be likely to meddle in ways that cause harm. Therefore, if Russia's stated strategy is accurately reflected in its actions, we would expect any interference to be related to specific foreign policy objectives or support for Russia-friendly candidates and to avoid overtly aggressive forms of interference. However, we would not expect to see interference aimed at exploiting or influencing domestic issues (such as divisive social issues) that have no direct impact on the targeted state's foreign policy decisionmaking.

If, in contrast to the stated strategy, Russia does seek to erode the foundations of its Western competitors' societies; to corrupt public trust in their political, military, economic, or other institutions; or to otherwise fundamentally weaken these societies, either as a goal in itself or for the purpose of forcing changes in their behavior, then we would expect to see interference efforts to agitate and exacerbate cultural, societal, or political grievances. For example, we could see interference efforts to discredit or support both sides of a debate for

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<sup>39</sup> Dov H. Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote: The Effects of Great Power Electoral Interventions on Election Results," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2, June 2016.



the purpose of reinforcing existing divisions. In these cases, Russian interference efforts would likely target the institutions or governments themselves rather than specific policy efforts they might be pursuing.<sup>40</sup>

### Scope and Approach

Using reports of interference to assess the Russian government's objectives is complicated by the relative paucity of reliable information on attribution. For this analysis, we examine open-source government documents, decisionmaker remarks, news reporting, and scholarly writings. This evidence is, by definition, limited because such actions are often presumed to go either unnoticed or unreported, so we have no sense of the universe of cases of Russian interference. Moreover, in many cases, some open-source analyses assume Russian government (or proxy) involvement or sponsorship using the content of the interference or the timing but offer no definitive evidence that could prove a causal linkage. Importantly, it is not always possible to tell whether a group based in Russia is acting under the direction of the government, particularly given the murky relationships between the state and non-state hackers. Therefore, a possible pitfall in this approach is the potential that we use behavior by organizations unaffiliated with the state or acting without official direction to inform our conclusions about the Russian state's objectives. In fact, with the exception of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, which is the best-documented case, the publicly available evidence is not robust enough to attribute definitively any other case to the Russian government. Given the limitations related to attribution, it is difficult even to identify the full universe of cases of alleged or actual Russian interference.

Nonetheless, this section provides an illustrative assessment of several of the most prominent examples of suspected Russian interference for which there is publicly available evidence of attribution. For

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<sup>40</sup> Euro-Atlantic institutions include political, economic, and security institutions, such as NATO and the EU. In other cases, the term *institutions* refers to the broader definition of the term in the political science context, to mean "the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interaction" (Douglass C. North, "Institutions," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Winter 1991, p. 97).

the purposes of this analysis, we assume that attribution to the government in these cases is correct.

The timing of interference and the content of Russian messages are important means of determining the objectives driving Moscow's behavior. Interference behaviors related to social issues (versus pro-Russia messaging on a foreign policy issue) that occur *outside* a campaign period or *after* an election (and not coterminous with other political processes, such as when a foreign policy decision is being considered, or in the run-up to a referendum) cannot be plausibly connected to achieving a particular policy objective and thus are inconsistent with the stated strategy.

### 2014 to 2018

It is important to note that there are no documented cases of Russian interference in Western elections before the 2014 breakdown in relations that followed the Ukraine crisis.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in the indictment of the IRA—the so-called “troll factory” that was actively working on social media platforms for interference in the 2016 U.S. election—we learn that the effort to meddle in the United States was launched in April 2014, almost immediately after the annexation of Crimea and the resulting Western sanctions.<sup>42</sup> Prior to that, the IRA's activities were aimed exclusively at Russian audiences. In short, as in the previous cooperation discussion, there is a pre- and post-2014 demarcation line between relatively more-cooperative Russian behavior toward the West and significantly more-assertive behavior.

As noted previously, interference can be consistent with Russia's stated strategic objectives vis-à-vis the West. Information campaigns can be a means of pushback on Western foreign policy behavior to which Moscow objects. Many of the recent alleged interference efforts appear to target specific goals that are in line with stated Russian interests. Even cases that involve support for candidates in elections or positions on referenda votes in which the interference efforts—

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<sup>41</sup> This is not true outside the West: Russia was actively interfering in domestic politics in the former Soviet region long before 2014. See Lucan Way and Adam Casey, “Russian Foreign Election Interventions Since 1991,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 520, March 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Indictment, 2018, p. 6.

whether propaganda campaigns, hacking and leaking of documents, or otherwise—can be intended to affect a specific policy-relevant outcome. One example is Moscow’s interference in the 2017 French presidential election. Candidate Marine Le Pen publicly supported Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the lifting of EU sanctions against Russia.<sup>43</sup> In 2014, Le Pen’s party had accepted a sizeable amount of funding (9.4 million euros) from banks linked to the Russian government.<sup>44</sup> Presumably, a Le Pen victory would have resulted in a pro-Russian politician in a seat of power in Western Europe who might have used her position to support the lifting of sanctions against Russia and to secure other favorable outcomes of interest to the Kremlin.

The content of Russian messaging efforts surrounding the French election was aimed at discrediting Le Pen’s opponent, Emmanuel Macron, who, by contrast, supported maintaining the sanctions against Russia as part of his campaign platform.<sup>45</sup> Messaging disseminated by Russian-owned or -affiliated news outlets appeared to originate or float several narratives aimed at discrediting Macron. In *RT* and *Sputnik*, he was painted as a tool of the American government and banking system who favored U.S. interests over French interests.<sup>46</sup> This targeted approach suggests that Russian efforts to interfere in the 2017 French presidential election were designed to result in a victory for the pro-Russian candidate Le Pen rather than to undermine French democracy or society more broadly.

There are several similar cases in which alleged Russian interference appears to have been aimed at achieving specific policy aims but used such aggressive tactics that one has to assume that Russia

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<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Gatehouse, “Marine Le Pen: Who’s Funding France’s Far Right?” BBC News, April 3, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Gatehouse, 2017; Max Seddon and Michael Stothard, “Putin Awaits Return on Le Pen Investment,” *Financial Times*, May 4, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> “Macron Camp Bars Russian News Outlets, Angers Moscow,” Reuters, April 27, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> “Ex-French Economy Minister Macron Could Be ‘US Agent’ Lobbying Banks’ Interests,” *Sputnik*, February 4, 2017; “Assange: WikiLeaks a trouvé des informations sur Macron dans des emails de Clinton,” *RT France*, February 3, 2017. Additionally, on the eve of the election, Macron and his political party’s email accounts were violated, and their contents (with some allegedly forged emails mixed in) were released.

had more-aggressive intentions. For example, Russia-affiliated actors are accused of plotting a coup in Montenegro to oust the country's pro-Western prime minister, Milo Djukanovic, in advance of the country's 2017 NATO accession. If Djukanovic (who was closely involved in Montenegro's accession to NATO) had lost power, the country's NATO accession could have stalled, particularly because domestic support for joining the alliance was not particularly high prior to the coup attempt.<sup>47</sup> The coup attempt, which was ultimately foiled, was also paired with anti-NATO messaging disseminated by Russia-affiliated media outlets in the country.<sup>48</sup>

Russia has long protested NATO enlargement, and its Foreign Ministry criticized NATO's action to approve Montenegro's membership bid as "deeply mistaken" and as a decision which "goes fundamentally against the interests of the people in this country and harms stability in the Balkans and Europe as a whole."<sup>49</sup> Putin's press secretary threatened a response, noting that "the continued eastward expansion of NATO and NATO's military infrastructure cannot but result in retaliatory actions from the east, i.e., from the Russian side, in terms of ensuring security and supporting the parity of interests."<sup>50</sup> As in the French election, the alleged Russian coup attempt appears to have been intended to further a specific policy objective—halting Montenegro's accession to NATO and preventing the institution's further enlargement. But the tactics were so extreme as to suggest that Russia does indeed have aggressive intent toward the West.

The 2016 U.S. presidential election is another similar case. The nature of Russian interference in the election suggests, as determined

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<sup>47</sup> Valerie Hopkins, "Indictment Tells Murky Montenegrin Coup Tale," *Politico*, May 23, 2017; "NATO Invitation to Montenegro Prompts Russia Warning," BBC News, December 2, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Jesse Chase-Lubitz, "As Sanctions Bill Stalls, Lawmakers Highlight Russian Interference in Montenegro," *Foreign Policy*, July 13, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Saim Saeed, "Russia Protests U.S. Approval of Montenegro's NATO Membership," *Politico*, April 13, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> "NATO Invitation to Montenegro Prompts Russia Warning," 2015; Government of Montenegro, "Latest Opinion Poll: 47.3% of Citizens Support Montenegro's NATO Accession," webpage, February 1, 2016.

by the collective judgment of the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC), that Moscow's behavior was driven by a specific objective: to help secure Donald Trump's victory or prevent the victory of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.<sup>51</sup> In its 2017 assessment, the IC found *RT*'s "consistently negative" coverage of Clinton and the hacking and leaking of Democratic National Committee emails by the GRU—which damaged Clinton's candidacy—to be evidence that Putin "ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election" in an effort to "denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency."<sup>52</sup> Moscow also "developed a clear preference for . . . Trump," according to the assessment.<sup>53</sup> The July 2018 indictment of the GRU hackers describes "large-scale cyber operations to interfere with the 2016 U.S. presidential election."<sup>54</sup>

The Kremlin might have determined that its interests would be better served by the election of a seemingly Russia-friendly Trump than by Clinton, whose tenure as Secretary of State had coincided with a deterioration in relations between Washington and Moscow.<sup>55</sup> Much of the content disseminated by the IRA was consistent with this analysis. As the 2018 indictment against the IRA states, the organization "engaged in operations primarily intended to communicate derogatory information about Hillary Clinton, to denigrate other candidates such as Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, and to support Bernie Sanders and then-candidate Donald Trump."<sup>56</sup> This behavior—attempting to influence the overall outcome of the election—appeared to be aimed at achieving a specific outcome related to Russia's foreign policy interests: specifically, the election of a candidate seen by the Kremlin as more sympathetic to Russia.

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<sup>51</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017, pp. 1–4.

<sup>53</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Indictment, 2018, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Indictment, 2018, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Indictment, 2018, p. 18.

But some ads and social media posts appeared to be designed to discourage minority populations from voting at all,<sup>57</sup> and the interference continued after the election. For example, in the days following Trump's victory, the IRA organized three rallies. One rally, organized by the IRA under the guise of the fictitious group "show your support for President-Elect Donald Trump," encouraged Trump supporters to gather in New York to celebrate the candidate's victory.<sup>58</sup> The IRA simultaneously organized two rallies denouncing Trump's victory: one in New York, sponsored by a different fabricated group, "Trump is NOT my President," and the other in Charlotte, North Carolina, by a third fictitious group, "Charlotte Against Trump."<sup>59</sup> Assuming the IRA's behavior is reflective of the Kremlin's objectives, the organization's attempt to spur political activism on both sides of a polarizing domestic political issue—Trump's victory—suggests that the Kremlin intended to stoke social tensions with no clear policy objective. If the IRA's objective had been merely to support one candidate over another, its activities should have ceased after Trump's victory.

The 3,500 IRA Facebook ads that were published by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in May 2018 demonstrate similar phenomena.<sup>60</sup> An analysis conducted by *USA Today* found that the ad buys continued long after the presidential election had ended.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the ad buys peaked in April 2017.

Moreover, the theme of many of the IRA Facebook ads—race—was a social fault line with little to no direct relevance to Russia's stated strategic objectives. Approximately 1,950 of the 3,500 ads made direct reference to race, and 900 of those 1,950 ads were placed *after* the November 2016 election. In fact, the race-related ads persisted through May 2017. Until they were shut down in August 2017, the IRA-linked

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<sup>57</sup> Indictment, 2018, pp. 18–20.

<sup>58</sup> Indictment, 2018, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Indictment, 2018, p. 23.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Social Media Advertisements," webpage, undated.

<sup>61</sup> Nick Penzenstadler, Brad Heath, and Jessica Guynn, "We Read Every One of the 3,517 Facebook Ads Bought by Russians. Here's What We Found," *USA Today*, May 13, 2018.

Facebook pages and profiles also advertised opposition to immigrants and targeted specific user groups, such as those who follow Fox News.<sup>62</sup>

This behavior suggests that the Russia-linked messaging was designed to foment ideological differences among Americans at a time when emotions related to the race issue were particularly high. Furthermore, race is a domestic policy issue with no direct bearing on U.S. foreign policy decisions related to Russia. It is therefore highly unlikely that these actions were motivated by a desire to influence U.S. behavior toward Russia. Rather, this behavior indicates that the messaging was intended to sow discord among Americans. This interpretation is consistent with what a former IRA employee recalls: “Our task was to set Americans against their own government: to provoke unrest and discontent.”<sup>63</sup>

### Summary

This analysis of select alleged Russian interference campaigns in the West leads to several observations. First, there were no documented cases of interference before the 2014 breakdown in relations with the West. Second, some documented interference efforts were linked to outcomes related to Russia’s foreign policy interests, either supporting Russia-friendly politicians or using information campaigns to oppose particular policies to which Moscow objected. Third, however, there were significant cases of alleged Russian interference in the West that did not appear to further any specific Russian foreign policy interest or that used tactics that suggested aggressive intent. Particular efforts to foment social and ideological tensions are consistent with the assertion that Russia sought to undermine Western institutions and societies more broadly.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Penzenstadler, Heath, and Guynn, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> “An Ex St. Petersburg ‘Troll’ Speaks Out: Russian Independent TV Network Interviews Former Troll at the Internet Research Agency,” *Meduza*, October 15, 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Because demarcating the universe of cases of Russian interference in the West is beyond the scope of this study, we cannot state definitively that Russia devotes more resources to one or the other line of effort.

## Conclusions

The evidence presented here paints a complex picture. Several of Moscow's actions after 2014 are clearly inconsistent with Russia's stated strategy of selective cooperation and selective pushback vis-à-vis the West. The interference efforts that sought to stoke racial tensions in the United States long after the 2016 election cannot plausibly be linked to specific Russian interests and thus are consistent with the view that Moscow seeks to weaken the West. However, the first section of this chapter documents continued Russian outreach to and cooperation with the West after 2014. In short, after 2014, there is a seeming contradiction: Moscow simultaneously pursues cooperation while taking steps to try to weaken the West. One possible explanation for this behavior is that selectively cooperating with the West is seen in Moscow as a means to the broader end of weakening the West, either by driving wedges between Western states or by gaining insight into Western priorities, practices, perspectives, and vulnerabilities that could then be used against the West.

Another possible explanation for this behavior is that weakening the West is seen in Moscow as a means to the end of changing Western foreign policy, particularly by ending greater Western activism on the regional and global levels. By inflaming racial divides, for example, Moscow might be seeking to make the United States more inward-looking and less focused on what Russia considers to be its overly ambitious (and, from Moscow's perspective, highly destabilizing) global engagement. If this is accurate, then Moscow appears willing to engage in ever-more extreme measures to achieve its objective of cooperation with the West on Russian terms, which would presume a less ambitious Western foreign policy. If true, however, this hypothesized strategy of taking actions to weaken the West to achieve Russia's vision of cooperation thus far has proven highly counterproductive because it has rendered any interaction with the Kremlin politically fraught—if not politically impossible—for Western governments. In any case, Russia seems unwilling or unable to accept the consequences of its actions: Moscow continues to pursue these two lines of effort without acknowledging that one (efforts to sow divisions in the West) makes the other (cooperation on shared interests) impossible.



## Strategy Element: Rebalance Away from the West

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### Stated Strategy

A central tenet of Russia's view of the international system is that it is currently undergoing a fundamental transformation. After a period of Western unipolar hegemony, power is rapidly shifting away from the West toward a group of countries usually referred to as "new centers of power." These include China, ASEAN states, Brazil, South Africa, India, Iran, and others. In Russia's major strategic documents and in its senior officials' speeches, this theory of power transition features prominently. For example, the Military Doctrine notes a "gradual redistribution of influence in favor of new centers of economic growth and political magnetism" as a central element of the international political-military situation.<sup>1</sup>

Russia, the strategy contends, must adjust its foreign policy to take these trends into account. "Western-centric" approaches should be left behind in favor of a focus on the new centers of power. As one major think-tank report put it, "In the medium term (10 years), the most rewarding opportunities are in the east and the south, where there is a four-billion-person market of consumers of [Russian exports]. Economically, and mentally, Russia should be not the eastern periphery of Europe, but the northern part of the huge Eurasia."<sup>2</sup> If the geopoliti-

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Karaganov, 2016, p. 20.

cal and economic future of the world will be decided by the non-West, Russia must focus on those states for its international engagement.

There has been considerable skepticism among observers about Russia's ability to deliver on its declarations of intent to rebalance its foreign policy. Some claim that this effort, particularly its Asian dimension, is essentially a bluff meant to grab the West's attention.<sup>3</sup> Others note the Western-centricity of Russia's elite, its ongoing large gas exports to Europe, and even its demographics: 80 percent of the population lives west of the Urals in what is known as "European Russia." Many argue that Russia's interest in the non-West has increased only because Russia has had no choice since the breakdown in relations with the West following 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of the motivation, Russia's leaders have stated that it is a major strategic imperative to ensure that the country's political, economic, and security engagements shift in line with this global power transformation. This chapter attempts to test Russia's assertions about its foreign policy rebalancing through quantitative measurements of state-to-state engagement. The objectives are to determine to which relationships Moscow devotes the most effort, and to highlight any change in the balance of efforts over the period under investigation.

## Evaluation Method

Methodologically, measuring the extent of Russia's rebalancing away from the West is a rather challenging task. The day-to-day practice of interstate relations is extremely difficult to measure or even observe; much of it operates below the level of principals and goes undocumented. Moreover, the existing data sets on international engagement focus on the very top of the pyramid of diplomacy: the foreign minister

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<sup>3</sup> As one analyst writes, "Despite a barrage of optimistic positive rhetoric claiming that Russia is pursuing a successful Asian policy, the truth is exactly the opposite" (Stephen J. Blank, "Russia's 'Pivot to Asia': The Multilateral Dimensions," National Bureau of Asian Research, working paper, June 28, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Daniele Fattibene, *Russia's Pivot to Asia: Myths and Realities*, IAI Working Papers, 2015.

and the president.<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of understanding a state's strategic priorities, even these top-level data contain too much noise to be analytically useful, because foreign minister and presidential engagements are often functions of three other types of variables: exogenous events (e.g., Putin had the most phone calls from mid-2015 to mid-2016 with the king of Saudi Arabia because of coordination on the oil price and the Syria crisis), regularly scheduled summits and ministerial meetings, and the location of a particular international organization. The challenge of filtering out irrelevant data is even more acute in terms of economic activities: Market forces have at least as much power as government policy over trade and investment flows. It is very difficult to control for the market when looking at aggregate national-level statistics. This is particularly true for a resource exporter, such as Russia; the price of its main exports is an exogenous factor that largely determines overall trade numbers.

To address these challenges, we created three unique data sets to isolate, as best as possible, Russia's state-directed political and economic engagement with other states. If Russia's declared strategic priority of pivoting to the non-West is in fact consistent with its behavior, we should see a reorientation in these data sets toward greater engagement with non-Western countries and regions. If the skeptics are correct, we should see no relative increase in ties with the non-West.

Throughout this section, we use the terms "Western" and "non-Western" countries to refer to the same respective sets of states. Box 9.1 shows a breakdown of these countries. We excluded Russia's immediate neighbors in the CIS because they fall into a distinct category in Moscow's foreign policy. Moreover, they are largely absent in the Russian strategic discussion about "new centers of power." It should be noted that the distinctions made here between Western and non-Western countries were necessarily subjective. We attempted as best as possible to reflect Russian thinking on this issue: For example, Japan and South Korea, even though they are U.S. allies, are generally referred to as part of the dynamic Asia-Pacific region and thus are not part of the

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<sup>5</sup> The visits and phone calls of both have been documented in recent years. For example, see "Two Top Diplomats, One Globe-Trotting Year," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 2016.

**Box 9.1**  
**Breakdown of Non-Western and Western Countries in This Report**

Western Countries	Non-Western Countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australia</li><li>• Austria</li><li>• Belgium</li><li>• Bosnia and Herzegovina</li><li>• Bulgaria</li><li>• Canada</li><li>• Croatia</li><li>• Czech Republic</li><li>• Denmark</li><li>• Finland</li><li>• France</li><li>• Germany</li><li>• Greece</li><li>• Hungary</li><li>• Israel</li><li>• Italy</li><li>• Netherlands</li><li>• Norway</li><li>• Poland</li><li>• Serbia</li><li>• Slovakia</li><li>• Slovenia</li><li>• Spain</li><li>• Sweden</li><li>• Switzerland</li><li>• Turkey</li><li>• United Kingdom</li><li>• United States</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Algeria</li><li>• Angola</li><li>• Argentina</li><li>• Bahrain</li><li>• Bolivia</li><li>• Brazil</li><li>• China</li><li>• Columbia</li><li>• Cuba</li><li>• Egypt</li><li>• Guinea</li><li>• India</li><li>• Indonesia</li><li>• Iran</li><li>• Iraq</li><li>• Japan</li><li>• Jordan</li><li>• Kenya</li><li>• Kuwait</li><li>• Malaysia</li><li>• Mexico</li><li>• Mongolia</li><li>• Morocco</li><li>• Mozambique</li><li>• Namibia</li><li>• Nicaragua</li><li>• Nigeria</li><li>• Pakistan</li><li>• Paraguay</li><li>• Philippines</li><li>• Qatar</li><li>• Saudi Arabia</li><li>• Singapore</li><li>• South Africa</li><li>• South Korea</li><li>• Sudan</li><li>• Tanzania</li><li>• Thailand</li><li>• United Arab Emirates</li></ul>

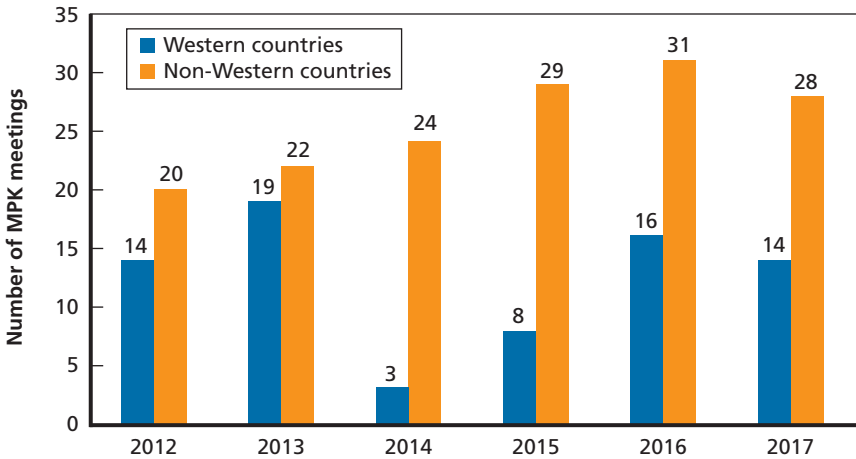
“old” West. Some countries, such as Turkey or Serbia, are listed here as Western, even though they are not portrayed as clearly in the Western camp in Russian writings. However, they are also not considered non-Western in the sense of being the beneficiaries of the global power shift, and therefore are more appropriately categorized as Western for the purposes of this study.

## **Government-to-Government Engagement**

To capture state-directed government-to-government engagement, we first compiled data on the frequency with which Russia’s bilateral inter-governmental commissions (MPKs) met between 2012 and 2017. The MPKs involve officials from various ministries and agencies, although they often focus on economic and trade relations. MPK meetings are good indicators of a government’s investment in a particular bilateral relationship because they require significant time and effort to arrange and carry out, and, unlike regularly scheduled multilateral meetings, they do not have to be held unless the two countries involved actually want to engage. Russia has established MPKs with an approximately equal number of Western and non-Western countries. With the exception of meetings with Germany, we counted Russian MPK meetings only when the Russian delegation was led by a federal cabinet-level minister, deputy prime minister, or the prime minister (see Appendix B for details).

From 2012 to 2017, the number of MPK meetings between Russia and non-Western countries grew significantly, while MPK meetings with Western countries declined in number (see Figure 9.1). For every year under consideration, there were more MPK meetings with non-Western countries, but 2014 clearly was a watershed year. Essentially, all MPK meetings with the West were cancelled in 2014, a result of the policy of diplomatic isolation implemented by Western countries following Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Since then, the numbers have gradually picked up, as more and more Western countries have broken with the isolation policy, but the meetings have not recovered to their 2013

**Figure 9.1**  
**Russia's MPK Meetings at Minister Level or Higher, 2012 to 2017**



SOURCE: Data compiled by authors from Russian press reports and official Russian government webpages.

levels. Meanwhile, we have not seen a corresponding drop in Russian MPK meetings with non-Western countries.

More than any other country that has established MPKs with Russia, China has a unique government-to-government relationship with Russia. The two countries have established nine commissions and subcommissions (all considered MPKs) pertaining to economics, energy, investment, and trade that are at the ministerial level and higher. Six of the nine Russia-China MPKs met every year from 2012 to 2017.

The second data set we created for measuring government-to-government engagement covers the international visits of the Russian ministers of agriculture, energy, industry and trade, and natural resources, plus the international visits of the first deputy prime minister, whose portfolio includes international economic matters. These ministers were chosen because their international travel is not regularly scheduled and is less driven by events than that of either the foreign minister or the president. These other ministers are not required to travel to any particular country as part of their duties; their foreign visits thus reflect preferences and priorities more than routines or

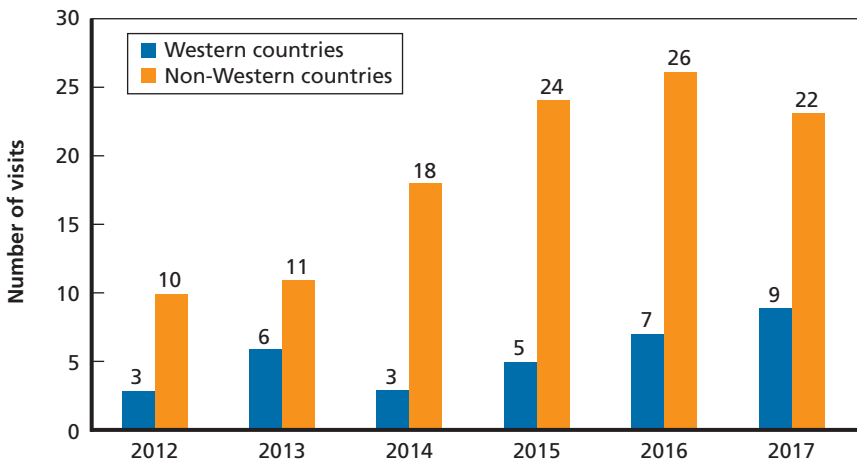
fixed requirements. We specifically looked at bilateral visits unrelated to multilateral meetings, thus excluding visits that were byproducts of previously scheduled engagements. See Appendix B for the full data set.

As demonstrated in Figure 9.2, the ministerial travel data also reflected a clear trend away from the West. Even as engagement with the West has recovered somewhat since 2014, it is clear that non-Western countries remain the priority, in accordance with Russia's declared strategy.

## Economic Engagement

It is extremely difficult to “locate” a state's strategy in economic data on aggregate trade and investment flows. The most significant factors in such macro trends are generally the invisible hand of the market, geography, and, in the case of a natural resource exporter, such as Russia, its resource endowment. However, even at this level, developments in

**Figure 9.2**  
**Bilateral Visits by Select Russian Ministers: 2012 to 2017**



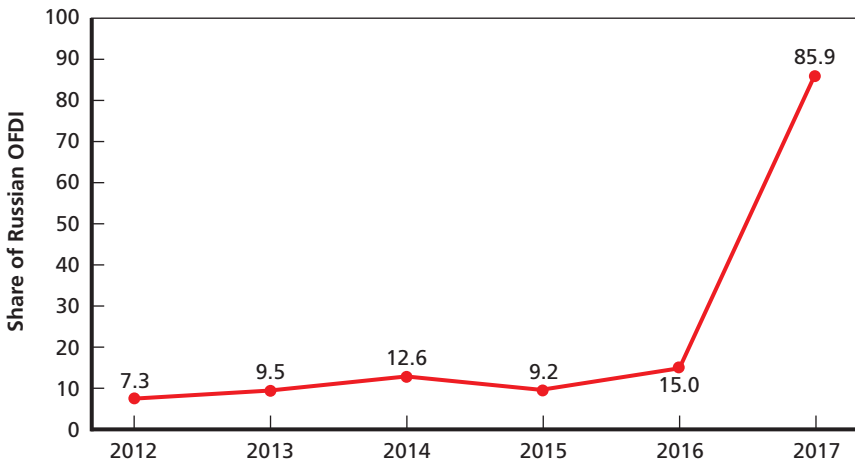
SOURCE: Data compiled by authors from Russian press reports and official Russian government webpages.

recent years show some interesting trends in the shifting focus of Russia's international economic ties. To illustrate these macro trends, we cull data from widely available data sets on Russia's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) and on Russia's exports and imports.

As seen in Figure 9.3, there has been a shift in Russia's net OFDI. In 2012, Russia's non-Western OFDI was only 7.3 percent of Russia's Western OFDI; but as of 2017, Russia's non-Western OFDI had risen to 85.9 percent of Russia's Western OFDI. The same data also show that from 2012 to 2017, Russia's Western OFDI actually decreased by 14.3 percent per year on average, whereas Russia's non-Western OFDI increased by 39 percent per year on average.

Export and import data depict similar trends, as shown in Figures 9.4 and 9.5. In 2013, Russia's exports to the non-West totaled

**Figure 9.3**  
Russian OFDI, Non-Western as Share of Western, 2012 to 2017

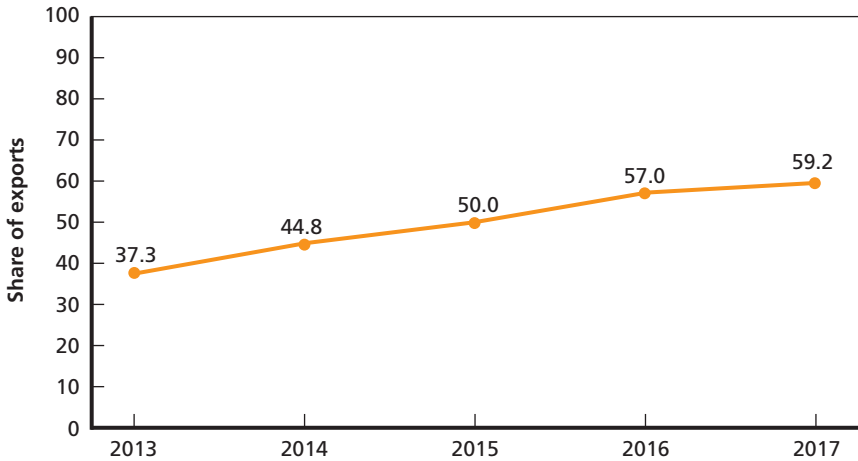


SOURCE: Calculations by the authors based on data from the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, "External Sector Statistics," webpage, May 15, 2020.

NOTE: Data exclude the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, Cyprus, and Jersey, which Russian firms frequently use as offshore tax havens. This exclusion accounts for the practice of "round-tripping"—i.e., the reinvestment of funds moved to offshore entities—of Russian money.



**Figure 9.4**  
**Russian Exports to Partner Countries, Non-Western as Share of Western, 2013 to 2017**



SOURCE: IMF, "Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), Russian Federation: Imports of Goods from Its Partners, Millions, US Dollars," data set, 2018.

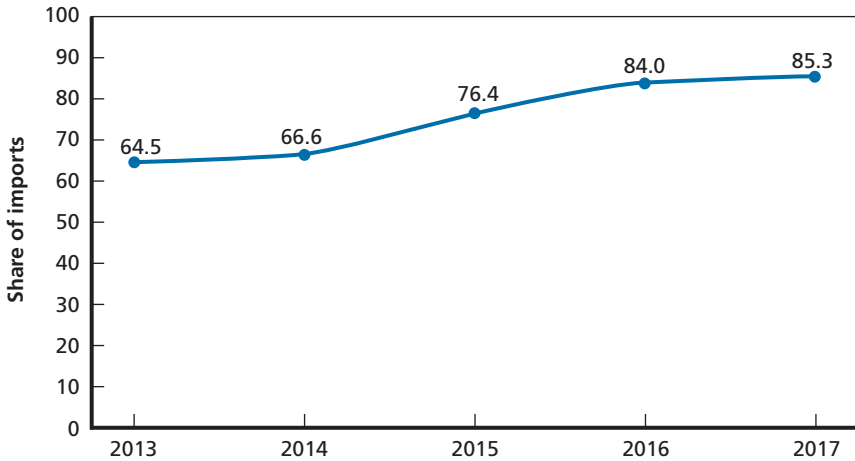
37.3 percent of its exports to the West.<sup>6</sup> By 2017, that figure had grown to 59.2 percent. Likewise, in 2013, Russian imports from the non-West were 64.5 percent of the total Western imports; by 2017, the imports from the non-West had jumped to 85.3 percent of the imports of the West. Some of this shift could be a function of the sanctions imposed by the EU and the United States on Russia and of Russia's counter-sanctions against them since 2014. But the volume of trade directly affected by sanctions was relatively modest.<sup>7</sup> Overall, the data represent quite a significant shift in investment and trading patterns.

These economic shifts are, at most, a partial function of government strategy. For this reason, we created our third unique data set. To test Russia's claim about its efforts to redirect engagement to the non-West, we sought to isolate state-directed economic activity. To

<sup>6</sup> IMF data on exports and imports by country go back to only 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Connolly, *Russia's Response to Sanctions: How Western Economic Statecraft Is Reshaping Political Economy in Russia*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

**Figure 9.5**  
**Imports to Russia from Partners, Non-Western as Share of Western, 2013 to 2017**



SOURCE: IMF, 2018.

do so, we examined the activities of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF)—Russia’s sovereign wealth fund—and a sample of state-owned enterprises (SOEs).<sup>8</sup> We chose the sample of SOEs using their weights in the Moscow Exchange’s State-Owned Companies Index, an index of SOEs listed on the main Moscow stock exchange.<sup>9</sup> The weights in this index are essentially proxies for company sizes relative to other SOEs. The top three spots on the index have consistently been held by Sberbank (the state-owned savings bank) and by Gazprom and Rosneft (the state-controlled oil and gas majors). Together, they represented between 63 and 70 percent of the index weight, on average, from 2012 to 2017—or roughly two-thirds of the size of all of the companies in the index combined.

To measure the geographic distribution of the SOEs’ international engagement, we examined these firms’ official press releases and web-

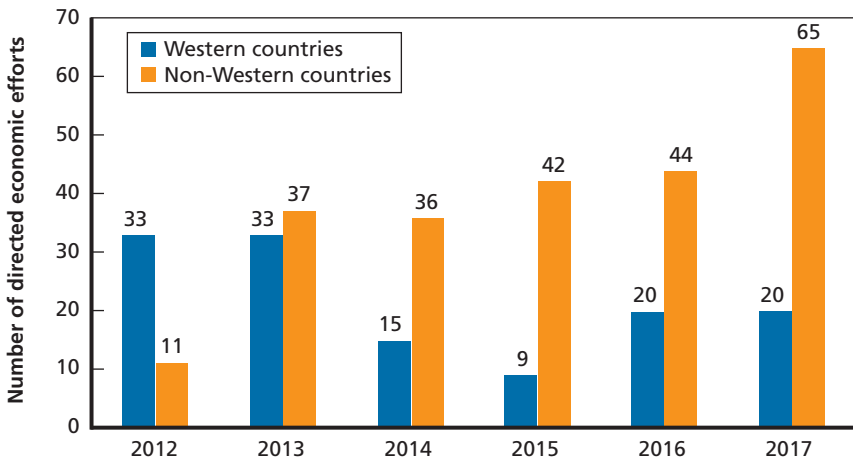
<sup>8</sup> We use the term *SOE* to refer to firms in which the government has at least a majority stake (50 percent + 1 share).

<sup>9</sup> Moscow Exchange, “Equity Indices for the Government Sector,” webpage, undated.

sites to document their foreign economic efforts during this period. We considered two categories of activity to be a foreign economic effort. First, we noted each signing of a memorandum of understanding, agreement, or contract with foreign governments or firms regarding joint ventures outside Russia or in Russia but with export potential. Second, we counted the SOEs' acquisitions of foreign firms or stakes in foreign firms. Because of the limited information available about specific agreements, we could not determine the economic significance or dollar amount of every activity; instead, we counted the aggregate annual observations of efforts. This approach captures the *efforts* made to achieve outcomes, not the outcomes themselves. Figure 9.6 presents our findings on the most numerous efforts. See Appendix B for details.

We chose these four entities—Sberbank, Gazprom, Rosneft, and RDIF—because their international behaviors are much more likely to

**Figure 9.6**  
**Directed Foreign Economic Efforts by Major State-Owned Entities, 2012 to 2017**



SOURCES: Data set compiled by the authors from official press releases of three major Russian SOEs (Sberbank, Gazprom, and Rosneft) and the RDIF.

NOTE: Efforts are defined as either (a) the signing of memoranda of understanding and/or agreements and contracts with foreign governments and firms regarding current or future ventures either overseas or in Russia but with export potential, or (b) acquisitions of companies and/or stakes in companies and/or projects abroad.

reflect stated strategy guidance than are those of firms that are not controlled by the government. While such factors as profit or market conditions certainly play into their decisionmaking, these SOEs are among the most likely to prioritize state strategy. The Power of Siberia—the \$55 billion pipeline that brings natural gas from Eastern Siberia to China—project is an apt example. By commercial metrics, the deal makes little sense: The return on capital for Gazprom will be low. The Kremlin essentially compelled Gazprom to undertake the project—which has been called “the largest undertaking in Russia’s energy industry for the past quarter of a century”—to forge a closer relationship with China.<sup>10</sup> As the energy analyst Pierre Noël writes, “For the purpose of cementing its relationship with China, the Russian government is essentially using Gazprom as a non-commercial entity, akin to its Soviet-era incarnation: the Ministry of the Natural Gas Industry.”<sup>11</sup> According to Noël’s calculations, the pipeline’s return on investment is more akin to a public works project than a commercial deal.

The Power of Siberia model—state-directed economic activity intended to make Russia’s pivot away from the West a reality—has played out in the aggregate activity of the four entities we studied. As seen in Figure 9.6, there has been a progressively increasing effort by these firms to forge ties with non-Western countries. As in the other data sets, there was a precipitous drop in engagement with the West following 2014, and a slight recovery in the subsequent years. But we have not seen a return to the pre-2014 levels of engagement with the West. Meanwhile, the engagement with the non-West has continued to increase throughout the period.

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Foy, “Russia’s \$55bn Pipeline Gamble on China’s Demand for Gas,” *Financial Times*, April 2, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Noël, “The Power of Siberia Natural-Gas Project: Commercial or Political?” *Politics and Strategy: The Survival Editors’ Blog*, webpage, January 30, 2017.

## Conclusions

The three unique data sets that we have compiled and analyzed demonstrate several interesting trends. Broadly speaking, they show that the Russian state's actions are consistent with its stated intention to rebalance its political and economic engagement away from the West and toward “new”—i.e., non-Western—centers of power. The data show that the Russian state is directing time, resources, and effort toward developing ties with non-Western partners. Again, we are measuring effort and policy outputs, not outcomes; in other words, we are not judging the success or failure of the Russian initiatives. The purpose here was instead to test whether the actions undertaken by the state reflect Russia's declared strategy of reorienting its global engagement. Generally speaking, this is, in fact, the case.

However, even though these trends are evident in 2012, we see a dramatic shift beginning in 2014: Engagement with the West drops off precipitously. This shift makes sense in the context of the post-Crimea sanctions and Western efforts to isolate Russia. It seems that Russia would have been willing to continue pre-2014 levels of engagement with the West even as it intensified outreach with the non-West, but it did not have the option once the EU and the United States cut off most avenues of dialogue. Although some engagement with the West has continued, and there is evidence to suggest that it is slowly rebounding, it has not returned to pre-2014 levels, while engagement with the non-West has continued to increase. In other words, the exogenous shock of the Maidan revolution and Russia's reaction to it did have a significant impact on the trends we have documented, but it seemed to accelerate preexisting dynamics rather than create fundamentally new ones. Russia was already rebalancing away from the West before 2014, in line with its stated strategy. Moscow is clearly intent on diversifying its foreign policy portfolio to reflect its views about the global power transformation.



## Conclusions and Implications

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All major powers face challenges in implementing grand strategy in an age of political uncertainty, rapid and disruptive technological advances, exogenous shocks, and economic crises. This certainly is true of Russia. Moscow, in particular, faces challenges in implementing its often lofty ambitions, given its shaky economic foundations and resistance to its plans from other states—even those in post-Soviet Eurasia, its immediate neighborhood.

### Summary of Findings

Our analysis of how Russia's observed actions match six key elements of its stated grand strategy lead us to the following findings. The numbering corresponds with the strategy elements as they are presented in the previous chapters.

1. *The Kremlin is attempting to ensure that resource decisions reflect the conclusion in its stated strategy that external aggression and internal threats are increasingly integrated.* Moscow has decided to maintain capable military and internal security forces and to further integrate these forces over time so that they can easily support one another in a crisis. Russia has revised legislation, force structure, and command relationships to allow for the integrated use of the military and internal security forces, consistent with the stated strategy. Further integration between military forces and internal forces over time is likely, which could

manifest itself in more joint exercises or task forces. Moscow has laid the legal groundwork for National Guard forces to be used to support military operations abroad, which could result in a larger force size available for such contingencies, even if such a decision seems unlikely at present.

2. *Russian stated strategy prioritizes post-Soviet Eurasia, but Moscow lacks a coherent and consistent approach to the region.* Although Russia is the dominant regional power in post-Soviet Eurasia, Moscow's level of political, economic, and military influence varies from country to country. With its closer allies, Moscow generally pursues less coercive means of achieving desired outcomes, but it does resort to coercion and even military force to try to prevent defection to Western-led integration projects. Some post-Soviet Eurasian states can resist Russian economic agreements or withdraw from Russia-led security organizations without punitive actions, so long as the states remain neutral or nonaligned with Russia's competitors.
3. *Russia's military actions since 2014 reveal a partial divergence from its stated strategy's emphasis on non-contact warfare and smaller-scale conflicts and suggest a greater emphasis on warfare at a larger (regional) scale.* Russian military actions and behaviors since 2014 are evolving in a way that is partially inconsistent with its official strategy: While efforts to develop the aerospace domain and highly mobile forces continue, Russia's army, marine, and airborne units have become larger and more-heavily armored. This course correction likely occurred because of the crisis in Ukraine and escalating tensions with NATO. Regardless of the cause, this shift contrasts with the claims of official strategy documents that major land wars are highly unlikely. Since 2014, Russia has recreated ten Ground Forces divisions, mostly near Ukraine. These posture enhancements in southwestern Russia suggest that the Kremlin views Ukraine as a likely source of instability for years to come. Meanwhile, Russia's military exercises are increasing in scope and scale each year, and the scenarios increasingly reflect a larger echelon of combat—one doctrinally considered to be a regional war.



4. *Consistent with its stated strategy, Russia's military is not designed to be an expeditionary force beyond limited campaigns and is primarily oriented toward regional contingencies.* Our analysis of force posture and procurement suggests that Moscow's expeditionary capabilities are quite limited: Strategic lift capabilities through 2025 and beyond will be insufficient to meet territorial defense needs while also supporting large expeditionary operations, the military's personnel system and force structure are not optimal for an expeditionary military, and Russia's allies have no organic ability to contribute to out-of-area operations. Furthermore, Russia has bases in only one country (Syria) beyond its immediate periphery and is not reconstituting a global basing network, although it is pursuing access agreements with countries in eastern Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. Russia has proven that structural limitations do not prevent its military from generating a limited or makeshift expeditionary capability in Syria—assuming a small force size of around 5,000 personnel and uncontested entry.
5. *Russia's stated strategy calls for selective pushback and limited cooperation with the West on Russia's terms, but there is a growing contradiction between aggressive Russian actions and its desire for cooperation.* Moscow has made clear its intention to force the West into scaling back its ambitions and to counter the elements of Western foreign policy that the Kremlin considers particularly problematic, such as alleged Western interference in Russia's domestic politics, "destabilizing" regime change operations in the Middle East and beyond, abuse of the international economic system to gain unfair advantage, and moving NATO forces and infrastructure closer to Russia's borders. At the same time that Russia vigorously objects to numerous Western behaviors, it still seeks cooperation with the West and Western institutions on matters of mutual interest. Yet Moscow has undertaken interference efforts that seem to suggest a far more aggressive intent. In short, since 2014, the contradiction in Russia's behavior toward the West has grown: Moscow pursues cooperation in some areas while taking steps to try to weaken the West in others. This strategy has thus

far proven highly counterproductive for Russia because it renders any interaction with the Kremlin politically fraught—if not politically impossible—for Western governments.

6. *Russia is rebalancing its political and economic engagement away from the West toward “new centers of power.”* One of Moscow’s central claims in its grand strategy—particularly about the nature of the current international system—is that power is shifting away from the West and toward “new centers of power.” Our analysis reveals that Russia is directing considerable time, resources, and effort to reorient its global engagement away from the West and toward these other states. Although this trend was evident at the beginning of the period under consideration, Russian political and economic engagement with Western countries declined precipitously after 2014 and increased with non-Western countries. This shift makes sense in the context of international sanctions and Western diplomatic efforts to isolate Russia after the annexation of Crimea. But the Ukraine crisis accelerated preexisting dynamics rather than creating fundamentally new ones. Moscow is clearly intent on diversifying its foreign policy portfolio to reflect its views about the global power transformation, and we anticipate continued Russian political, economic, and defense cooperation with states that Russia considers to be rising powers, such as China, India, and other regional leaders in the Middle East, Africa, and South America. In particular, the Sino-Russian relationship is becoming deeply institutionalized.

## Overarching Implications

The six discrete analyses in the preceding section suggest five overarching implications for understanding the evolution of Russia’s grand strategy.

*Russian stated strategy can generally be considered a reliable predictor of the state’s efforts.* Usually, Moscow attempts to match its actions with its words. However, at times, its efforts fall short of rhetoric. More-

over, Russian stated strategy tends to articulate specific—if lofty—ambitions, while Russian actions and resource decisions to effectuate that strategy appear to be more experimental, ambiguous, and reactive.

*Russia has reacted to the Ukraine crisis and subsequent breakdown in relations with the West in ways that cause its behavior to diverge from its stated strategic goals.* These events have had dramatic consequences that altered Russia's political, economic, and military outlook. Moscow's reactions to the major exogenous shock of the Maidan revolution can account for several of the divergences between its stated strategy and its demonstrated behavior.

*Insufficient economic resources and a lack of political influence limit Moscow's ability to realize its stated objectives.* Russia faces multiple challenges in implementing its lofty ambitions, given its shaky economic foundations and the opposition to its plans even in its immediate neighborhood in post-Soviet Eurasia, let alone at a global level. Resource limitations impose structural constraints on Russian behavior, preventing Moscow from, for example, attracting its neighbors with the prospect of greater prosperity.

*Russian stated strategy prioritizes threats and thus implies acceptance of certain risks in low-priority areas. In practice, however, Russia seems unwilling or unable to accept these risks, and thus allocates resources in ways inconsistent with its stated strategy.* The Kremlin sees threats emerging from many areas, domains, and countries. The Russian leadership's pervasive insecurity and related attempts to create buffers against instability on multiple fronts—domestic or interstate, regional or global—often prevent effective implementation of stated strategy while further constraining Russia's already limited resources.

*Our analysis does not suggest that Russia's revealed grand strategy is fundamentally divergent from its stated one.* The divergences between stated strategy and observed behavior discussed in this study seem to be element-specific and contingent rather than systematic. Russia does not achieve true leadership in its neighborhood largely because of resistance to its objectives from neighboring states; in most cases, Moscow settles for less than its sought-after level of control if it encounters that pushback, with the prominent exception of Ukraine. Large-scale ground warfare seems to have returned to Russian planning because of

a contingent event—the war in Ukraine. After 2014, when the Kremlin could not achieve a relationship on its desired terms with the West, it resorted to assertive tactics that are too controversial to include in a stated strategy. In all three of these cases, Russia *attempted* to implement stated strategic objectives but was forced to adapt those objectives to new realities that emerged.

## Considerations for U.S. Army Planners

Our study of Russian grand strategy points to several considerations for U.S. Army planners and other U.S. policymakers.

*Strategic competition will remain most intense around Russia's post-Soviet Eurasian periphery.* Russia uses coercion (including, at times, military force) in the region not to impose total control but to prevent neighboring states from integrating with rival economic and security blocs.

*Moscow will continue to diversify its foreign policy portfolio away from the West; over time, this diversification could lessen the impact of sanctions and other Western leverage.* Russia will continue political, economic, or military cooperation with countries it considers rising powers, such as China, India, and other regional leaders in the Middle East, South America, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific.

*Russia's defense budget has plateaued to 2021, but its military requirements have not.* Given that Russian defense spending is expected to be stagnant to 2021, it is unlikely that the military will be able to excel at the multiple priorities it is pursuing simultaneously: conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, raising personnel readiness to a high level, modernizing the conventional and nuclear force, developing hypersonic weapons and other next-generation technologies, and training for larger-scale combat operations. The desire to excel in all of these fields is understandable, given the wide variety of threats that Russia's stated grand strategy identifies. However, Moscow will struggle to develop a superpower's portfolio of tools with a constrained defense budget.

*Russia might revise its military doctrine in the coming years to bring it into alignment with recent resource decisions.* If recent military behaviors

are any indicators, then such a revision would include a greater emphasis on the role of land power and large-scale clashes between militaries.

*Russian training events will continue to grow larger and more complex in the coming years, and might soon include all four MDs, as Moscow emphasizes larger-echelon combat.* Despite the impressive size of these exercises, Russia remains structurally unable to support a protracted large-scale war with NATO.

*Russian special forces, private military contractors, and intelligence operatives will increasingly be used abroad, including in areas where the U.S. military is present.* U.S. commanders and defense policymakers should consider creating rules of engagement or standard operating procedures for interacting with such groups when their affiliation is ambiguous, particularly in congested battlespaces.



## National Security, Defense, and Federal Budget Trends

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To assess how the Russian government allocates financial resources for external and internal threats, we analyzed the two expenditure chapters of the state budget that are most relevant to military spending and internal national security spending. The first of the two chapters, National Defense, consists of seven subchapters and includes military spending, defense research, and management of the country's nuclear weapons (see Table A.1).<sup>1</sup> The largest share of spending is appropriated through the subchapter called Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereafter referred to as *Armed Forces*). The unclassified portion of this subchapter is appropriated entirely to the Ministry of Defense.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter, National Security, consists of 12 subchapters and is largely composed of spending on public order and law enforcement, the security services, and emergency management functions (see Table A.2). The largest subchapter, Internal Affairs, is mostly unclassified, and the associated budget is appropriated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for criminal investigations, transportation, and other issues

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<sup>1</sup> In 2012, a subchapter called Participation in Collective Security (i.e., peacekeeping operations) contained funding related to Russian participation in peacekeeping in Sudan. This subchapter has not received funding in the years that followed (see Table A.3) (Julian Cooper, *Russian Military Expenditure: Data, Analysis, and Issues*, Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency, FOI-R-3688-SE, September 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, *Ispolnenie federal'nogo byudzheta i byudzhetov byudzhetnoi sistemy RF*, 2018.

**Table A.1**  
**National Defense Budget Subchapters for 2017**

Subchapter	2017 Spending (billion rubles, nominal)	Share of Total (percent)
Armed Forces	2,219.1	77.8
Mobilization and Commissariats	6.6	0.2
Mobilization of the Economy	3.4	0.1
Nuclear Weapons	44.4	1.6
Implementation of International Military-Technical Commitments	8.8	0.3
Applied Scientific Research	270.5	9.5
Other Expenditures	299.5	10.5
Total	2,852.27	100.0

SOURCE: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018; calculations by authors.

of public order.<sup>3</sup> The second-largest subchapter is Security Services, which is almost entirely classified and includes funding for entities, such as the FSB Federal Protection Service and Foreign Intelligence Service.<sup>4</sup>

## Russian Budget Growing Increasingly Classified

The Russian budget is becoming more classified over time, which further complicates analysis of its contents (see Table A.3). For example, we know that the topline values of the largest National Defense subchapter, Armed Forces, grew by 10.5 percent on average per year in nominal terms, or approximately 4.3 percent in real terms. This subchapter is important because it contains spending on personnel and operations; it also contains information on spending on procurement

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, 2013.



**Table A.2**  
**National Security Budget Subchapters for 2017**

Subchapter	2017 Spending (billion rubles, nominal)	Share of Total (percent)
Procurator	98.6	5.1
Internal Affairs	647.7	33.8
Internal Troops (National Guard)	222.6	11.6
Justice Services	53.9	2.8
Correctional System	218.5	11.4
Security Services	295.4	15.4
Border Guards	140.4	7.3
Emergency Services	78.9	4.1
Fire Safety	117.4	6.1
Migration Services	2.4	0.1
Applied Scientific Research	32.3	1.7
Other Expenditures	10.0	0.5
Total	1,918.03	100.0

SOURCE: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018; calculations by authors.

(the state defense order [SDO]) in its classified portion. However, because of classification of the subchapter's contents, we cannot know the exact programs that these monies fund.<sup>5</sup> Of the other subchapters in National Defense, Nuclear Weapons exhibited the most growth over

<sup>5</sup> Cooper, 2013; Cooper, 2016. The classified portion is an important component of the SDO, the annual spending package for military modernization objectives under the SAP. The SAP relevant to the period, SAP 2011–2020, was signed into law by then-President Dmitry Medvedev at the end of 2010. Although the precise amount of planned spending on the Ministry of Defense in the 2011–2020 SAP cannot be confirmed, researchers estimate the amount at approximately 19 trillion rubles for the procurement of new armaments and hardware, spending on research and development, and modernization and repair of existing weaponry.

**Table A.3**  
**Classification of National Defense by Subchapter, 2012 and 2017**

Subchapter	2012 Share Classified (Percent)	2017 Share Classified (Percent)
Armed Forces	40.7	60.5
Mobilization and Commissariats	0.0	0.0
Mobilization of the Economy	100.0	100.0
Nuclear Weapons	100.0	100.0
International Commitments	61.6	76.9
Applied Scientific Research	92.9	95.7
Other Expenditures	48.6	55.6

SOURCE: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018; calculations by authors.

the period, 10.1 percent per year in nominal terms or 3.9 percent in real terms. The remaining subchapters, Mobilization and Commissariats, Mobilization of the Economy, International Commitments, and Other Expenditures, grew by modest amounts in nominal terms and saw general declines in real terms over the same period.

The two additional channels for funding the SDO are the classified portion of the Applied Scientific Research subchapter and state-guaranteed credits to defense industry firms.<sup>6</sup> From 2012 through 2017, the SDO is estimated to have increased from approximately 890.3 billion rubles to 1.6 trillion rubles, growth of approximately 12.5 percent on average per year, or 6.2 percent in real terms (Figure A.1), to meet the modernization plans under the SAP.<sup>7</sup> There was a large, one-off payment for indebted defense industry firms in 2016 that is reflected in the 2016 SDO number.

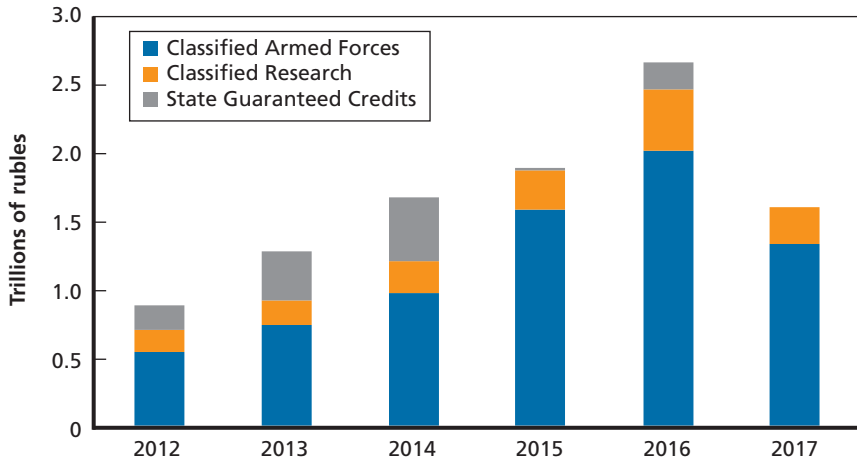
An analysis of spending on internal threat mitigation is complicated because the most-relevant subchapters have significant classified components, and the precise allocation of topline funds remains opaque

<sup>6</sup> Cooper, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Estimate by the authors using budgetary publications from the Russian Duma, recapped in Cooper, 2016.

**Figure A.1**

**State Defense Order Funding by Budget Subchapter, 2012 to 2017, in Trillions of Rubles**



SOURCES: Data compiled by authors from Russian press reports and official Russian government websites. Calculations by authors using Federal Treasury of the Russian Federation, "Federal Budget," data set, May 15, 2020; State Duma of the Russian Federation, Committee for Budget and Taxes, "Programma gosudarstvennikh garantii Rossiiskoi Federatsii v valiute, Rossiskoi Federatsii na 2015 god na plahovyi period 2016 i 2017 godov," undated; and IMF, "Gross Domestic Product and Components Selected Indicators: Russian Federation," data set, 2020.

(see Table A.4): (1) the Security Services (which include the FSB, Federal Protection Service, and Foreign Intelligence Service); (2) Border Guards; (3) Emergency Services, which houses the Main Directorate of Special Programs focusing on mobilization in emergencies or war-time; (4) Applied Research, of which the classified portion is assumed to be for the security services; and (5) Internal Troops (although largely unclassified), which funds the newly formed National Guard.<sup>8</sup>

### Spending on National Defense Versus National Security

We examined the federal budget for military and internal security forces to test Russian strategy claims about external and internal

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, 2013.

**Table A.4**  
**Classification of National Security Spending by Select Budget**  
**Subchapters, 2012 and 2017**

Subchapter	2012 Share Classified (Percent)	2017 Share Classified (Percent)
Internal Troops	4.6	7.0
Security Services	99.7	99.8
Border Guards	99.1	100.0
Emergency Services	41.6	49.1
Applied Scientific Research	86.6	92.4

SOURCE: Russian Ministry of Finance, 2018; calculations by authors.

threats and how the two will become increasingly linked. If strategy is in alignment with budget decisions (i.e., consistent with the balanced threat assessment in Table 4.2), we would expect that both of these groups would be well funded. If either military forces or internal security forces were found to be significantly underfunded, that budget disparity would be inconsistent with the priorities found in Russian grand strategy. For this analysis, we evaluated changes to the Russian federal budget from 2012 to 2021 (2020 and 2021 are government projections at the time of writing).

Of the fourteen expenditure chapters in the federal budget, the National Defense chapter contains expenditures to address external threats, and the National Security and Law Enforcement chapter contains expenditures to address internal threats.<sup>9</sup> We analyzed budget

<sup>9</sup> The information on the contents of these expenditure chapters comes from such organizations as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (Nan Tian, Aude Fleurant, Pieter D. Wezeman, and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2016*, Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2017). Some elements are absent from these chapters (e.g., military pensions in the chapter on social policy) (Cooper, 2013).

expenditures in real terms and adjusted the nominal budget numbers for inflation.<sup>10</sup>

Our analysis revealed that spending patterns for the military and internal security forces are consistent with Russian grand strategy and consistent with the balanced force posture outlined in Table 4.2. Defense spending is slightly higher than internal security spending (25 percent higher on average over the time period investigated, largely driven by procurement costs, which is appropriate given the expense of certain types of military equipment and large procurement orders), but it is not drastically higher in a way that makes it inconsistent with grand strategy directives (see Figure A.2).<sup>11</sup> What follows is an in-depth analysis of relevant budget chapters.

### ***Trends in National Defense Spending***

From 2012 through 2017, defense spending increased by an average of 3.4 percent annually in real terms, while national security spending declined by an average of 4.8 percent (using 2017 rubles). Over this period, the Kremlin largely spared defense spending from budget cuts that affected most other elements of the federal budget. In terms of overall spending, the Russian government spent, on average, 25 percent more on national defense versus national security and law enforcement from 2012 to 2017 (by comparison, China's internal security budget was around 18 percent higher than its defense budget during this time).<sup>12</sup> In nominal terms, total spending on national defense grew from 1.8 trillion rubles to nearly 2.9 trillion rubles, a 9.5-percent average annual increase over the five-year period from 2012 to 2017 (see the bottom row of Table A.5). This growth rate was influenced by the

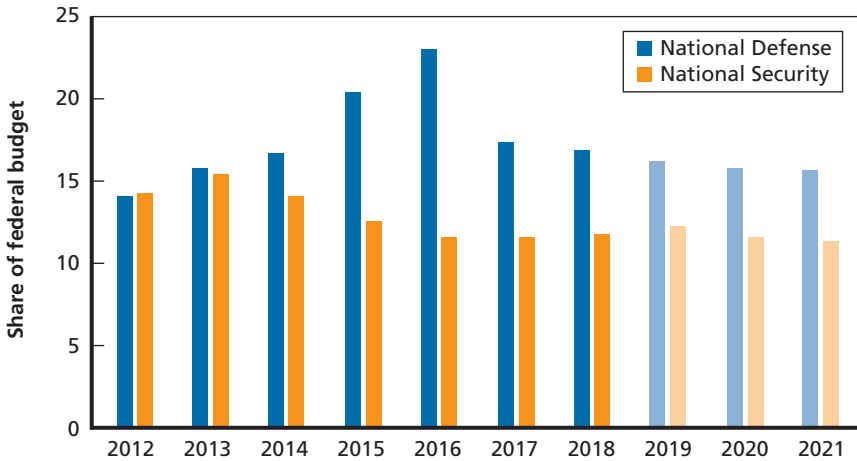
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<sup>10</sup> A Russian GDP deflator from the IMF is used to estimate budget expenditures in real terms. Although there are merits to using a consumer price index or public consumption index, those indices can overstate or understate prices compared with a GDP deflator in specific years (Cooper, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, *Byudzheth dlya grazhdan: k federal'nomu zakonu o federal'nom byudzhete na 2018 god i na planovyi period 2019 i 2020 godov*, Moscow, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Adrian Zenz, "China's Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data," Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, Vol. 18, No. 4, March 12, 2018.

**Figure A.2**  
**National Defense and National Security Chapters as Shares of the Russian Federal Budget, 2012–2021**



SOURCES: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2017; Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018.

NOTE: Calculations by authors; 2019–2021 figures are projected by the Ministry of Finance.

large one-time debt service for the Russian defense industry in 2016.<sup>13</sup> Some Western analysts have highlighted a seemingly large decrease in defense spending from 2016 to 2017 and beyond, but the high defense expenditures in 2015 and 2016 should be considered one-off lump-sum payments for a very specific purpose.

Looking more narrowly at procurement trends, Russia will spend more on military procurement to 2027 than on internal security procurement. This is unsurprising because military equipment is more expensive than internal security forces' equipment. In nominal terms, defense procurement is planned to outpace domestic security procurement by a ratio of five to one, or 20 trillion rubles to 4 trillion rubles. In terms of growth, however, internal security procurement is set to

<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Finance released approximately \$11.8 billion to pay off government debt held by arms producers near the end of 2016. This inflated 2016 spending on National Defense, which originally had been budgeted to decline (Tian et al., April 2017).

**Table A.5**  
**Spending on National Defense by Subchapter, in Billions of Rubles**

Subchapter	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Nominal Change (percent)	Real Change (percent)
Armed Forces	1,350.0	1,601.9	1,885.9	2,432.9	2,935.6	2,219.1	10.5	4.3
Mobilization/ Commissariats	6.4	6.5	6.5	6.3	6.9	6.6	0.7	-4.9
Mobilization of Economy	4.9	4.7	4.0	4.0	3.6	3.4	-7.3	-12.5
Peacekeeping Operations	0.1	—	—	—	—	—	N/A	N/A
Nuclear Weapons	27.5	29.3	36.7	44.4	45.6	44.4	10.1	3.9
International Commitments	7.7	5.9	6.5	10.3	9.9	8.8	2.7	-3.0
Applied Scientific Research	162.5	195.8	244.6	318.5	471.3	270.5	10.7	4.5
Other Expenditures	253.3	259.6	295.0	364.9	302.5	299.5	3.4	-2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,812.4</b>	<b>2,103.7</b>	<b>2,479.2</b>	<b>3,181.3</b>	<b>3,775.4</b>	<b>2,852.3</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>

SOURCES: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018; IMF, 2020.

NOTES: Calculations by authors. Nominal change and real change statistics are average annual rates from 2012 to 2017. — indicates no data for that year.

increase by up to 25 percent by 2027, while military procurement spending will be relatively stagnant, with only a 5-percent increase.<sup>14</sup> Following large defense spending spikes to service defense industry debt in 2015 and 2016, defense spending has now returned to 2014 levels and will see only modest growth through 2021 (see Figure A.2).

<sup>14</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, “Russia’s State Armament Program 2020: Is the Third Time the Charm for Military Modernization?” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 125, 2010; Alexandra Dzhordzhevich and Ivan Safronov, “U trillionov est’ dva soyuznika—armiya i flot,” *Kommersant*, December 18, 2017.

Spending on military modernization has not been without trade-offs in the larger federal budget. National Defense was one of the few budget chapters to see growth over this period in relative terms (14.1 percent of total federal budget expenditures in 2012 compared with 17.4 percent in 2017). Table A.8 describes these changes in full.

### ***Trends in National Security Spending***

By comparison, national security spending was generally flat over the period, with modest average annual growth of 0.8 percent, from 1.84 trillion rubles in 2012 to 1.9 trillion rubles in 2017 in nominal terms (see bottom of Table A.6). But this modest increase did not outpace inflation; in real terms, national security spending decreased by 4.8 percent per year. This decline is mainly attributable to a 3.3-percent average decline in spending for the largest subchapter, Internal Services, which is mostly unclassified spending on public order and law enforcement; however, these levels were still adequate for these forces. Some elements of national security saw growth over the period, driven mostly by better equipment and training for the National Guard. Border Guards funding grew by 10.4 percent in nominal terms and by 4.2 percent in real terms. The National Guard (part of the Internal Troops subchapter) appears to be well funded since its 2016 inception, partly as a result of consolidating and streamlining subordinate agencies, and likely also because of political prioritization. Funding for Internal Troops nearly doubled in 2017—to 222.6 billion rubles—to support the newly created entity.<sup>15</sup> This was the largest spending increase in the National Security chapter over the period. The highly classified Security Services subchapter (which includes spending for Russian intelligence agencies) experienced modest growth of 2.6 percent annually over the period in nominal terms, but a decline of 3.1 percent in real terms.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> This decline in funding for the security services might be surprising, given Putin's perceived fondness for them. One explanation is that the Security Services reported greater funding through 2009, Putin's first two terms in office, while the Armed Forces received less funding (Julian Cooper, "The Funding of the Power Agencies of the Russian State: An Update: 2005 to 2014 and Beyond," *Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, No. 16, 2014).



**Table A.6**  
**Spending on National Security by Subchapter, in Billions of Rubles**

Subchapter	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Nominal Change (percent)	Real Change (percent)
Procurator	38.7	48.4	96.0	88.3	86.9	98.6	20.6	13.8
Internal Services	766.1	763.1	768.2	707.3	714.2	647.7	-3.3	-8.7
Internal Troops	122.3	128.5	128.6	120.5	116.4	222.6	12.7	6.4
Justice Services	52.8	56.7	55.0	51.9	52.9	53.9	0.4	-5.2
Correctional System	206.3	63.3	247.6	239.9	226.7	218.5	1.2	-4.5
Security Services	259.2	309.3	315.3	307.1	304.2	295.4	2.6	-3.1
Border Guards	85.5	132.9	142.6	136.7	130.0	140.4	10.4	4.2
Narcotics	23.4	31.3	31.7	28.7	—	—	N/A	N/A
Emergency Services	87.0	88.9	88.6	91.4	78.2	78.9	-1.9	-7.4
Fire Safety	105.5	118.5	118.5	112.2	118.2	117.4	-2.2	-3.6
Migration Services	31.1	39.3	44.7	38.6	31.8	2.4	-40.1	-43.4
Applied Research	32.7	40.6	39.5	31.8	28.8	32.3	-0.2	-5.8
Other Expenditures	32.3	40.6	9.9	11.2	10.3	10.0	-21.0	-25.4
Total	1,842.9	2,061.4	2,086.2	1,965.6	1,898.6	1,918.1	0.8	-4.8

SOURCES: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018; IMF, 2020.

NOTES: N/A = cannot be calculated because not all data are available. Calculations by authors. The spike in Internal Troops funding is reflective of the National Guard's establishment in 2016. Nominal change and real change statistics are average annual rate changes from 2012 to 2017.

Budget trends have recently changed and are bringing national security spending closer together with defense spending: Spending on internal security forces grew 10 percent between 2017 and 2018, and government projections through 2021 will bring national security spending closer to defense spending—closer to earlier ratios observed around 2014.

### ***Budget Outlook***

Economic trends and Russia's conservative fiscal policies serve as constraints on Russia's stated ambitions for its military and internal security forces. As of now, it appears that the Russian government does not plan to drastically change the funding for the Ministry of Defense or National Guard, using its forecasted budgets to 2021. In fact, the Russian military and internal security services will likely not see a dramatic funding increase, at least through 2021, without significant trade-offs in other spending categories in the federal budget. As the Russian economy has been buffeted by sanctions, the ruble's fluctuating value, and instability in gas and oil prices, the Finance Ministry has recommended fiscally conservative budgets through 2021, with national defense and national security spending forecasted with negligible growth rates (both less than 1 percent) through 2021. Kremlin leadership has directed domestic social programs and other federal budget categories to receive better funding in the years ahead after most federal spending categories saw cuts in their budgets from 2014 to 2018.<sup>17</sup> Rising oil and gas prices will not immediately translate into more funding, as Russia will first seek to replenish its national wealth fund (a savings fund that Russia would like to maintain at 7 percent of GDP; it is at 4 percent of GDP as of late 2018). A shift in policy toward large amounts of foreign borrowing would help Russia meet social and security spending requirements should its wealth funds be unable to support federal deficit spending, but such a shift is unlikely given Russian leadership preferences.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> "Russia's Finance Ministry Fully Spent Its Reserve Fund in 2017," Reuters, January 10, 2018.

## Federal Budget Trends

Spending on military modernization has not been without trade-offs. While national defense spending grew from 14.1 percent of the federal budget in 2012 to 17.4 percent in 2017, most other categories of the budget saw cuts of 0.2 percent to 17 percent in real terms (see Table A.7). National defense was one of the few chapters to see growth in this period in real terms. Russian economists have warned that, although investments in defense increased government orders and demand, this has come at the expense of investing in human capital for longer-term GDP growth. If budget priorities are not refocused toward education, health, and infrastructure, economists warn that the country could see GDP declines of 0.3 percent per year in the 2020s.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the government is taking these warnings seriously. The Kremlin and the Ministry of Finance are imposing ceilings on Russian defense and security spending that will affect the development of these forces through 2025. The three-year federal budget for 2018, with preliminary spending plans for 2019 to 2020, cuts national defense spending by 2.8 percent, putting funding in line with 2014 or 2015 levels (Table A.8). National defense spending is then budgeted to increase by a moderate 0.7 percent through 2020. National security is slated to increase by 9.9 percent from 2017 to 2018—driven mostly by new equipment acquisition and training for the National Guard—but will grow by a more moderate 0.8 percent through 2020. The three-year figures represent planned spending and are not final.

Since the early 2000s, Russia generally has preferred not to finance deficits through foreign loans (particularly from international financial institutions) and instead relies on domestic debt issuance and, since 2014, on its reserve funds. Patterns suggest that budget deficits are increasingly common (Figure A.3). Russia began to dip heavily into its reserve funds following the 2008 global financial crisis, and again after the economic shocks that came in 2014 with Western sanctions and the drop in the oil price.

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<sup>19</sup> Analysis by Aleksei Kudrin and Aleksander Knobel of the Center for Strategic Development, cited in Tatiana Lomskaya, “Ekonomika proigrala voinu,” *Vedomosti*, October 5, 2017.

**Table A.7**  
**Federal Budget Expenditures, 2012 Versus 2017**

Chapter	2012 (billion rubles)	2017 (billion rubles)	Nominal Change (percent)	Real Change (percent)	Share 2012 (percent)	Share 2017 (percent)
Government Administration	809.9	1,162.4	7.6	1.5	6.3	7.1
National Defense	1,812.4	2,852.3	9.5	3.4	14.1	17.4
National Security and Law Enforcement	1,843.0	1,918.0	0.8	-4.8	14.3	11.7
National Economy	1,968.5	2,460.1	4.6	-1.3	15.3	15.0
Housing and Utilities Infrastructure	228.8	119.5	-12.2	-17.1	1.8	0.7
Environmental Protection	22.5	92.4	32.6	25.2	0.2	0.6
Education	603.8	615.0	0.4	-5.3	4.7	3.7
Culture and Cinematography	89.9	89.7	0.0	-5.6	0.7	0.5
Health Care	613.8	439.9	-6.4	-11.7	4.8	2.7
Social Policy	3,859.7	4,992.0	5.3	-0.6	29.9	30.4
Sport	45.7	96.1	16.0	9.5	0.4	0.6
Mass Media	77.5	83.2	1.4	-4.3	0.6	0.5
Public and Municipal Debt Service	320.0	709.2	17.3	10.7	2.5	4.3
Transfers to Regional Budgets	599.4	790.7	5.7	-0.2	4.6	4.8
Total	12,895.0	16,420.3	5.0	-0.9	100.0	100.0

SOURCES: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, "Ezhegodnaya informatsiya ob ispolnenii federal'nogo biudzheta (dannye s 1 Yanvarya 2006 g.)," data set, April 22, 2020; IMF, 2020; calculations by authors.

NOTE: Percent nominal and real change represent average annual calculation from 2012 through 2017.

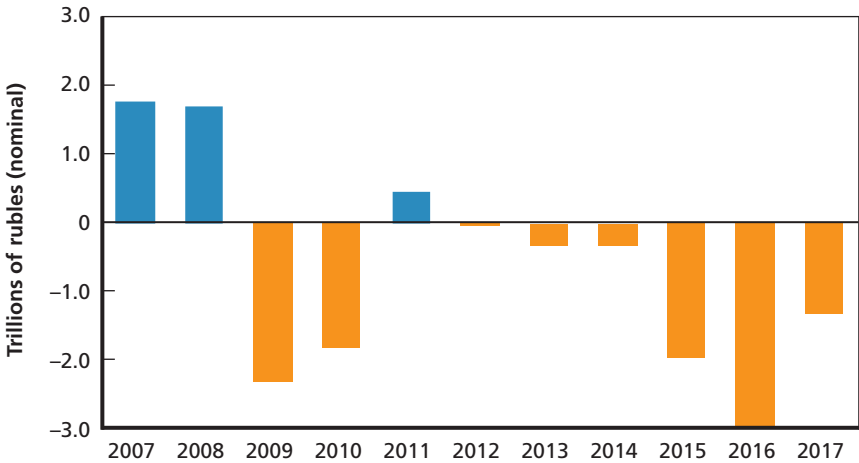
**Table A.8**  
**Planned Federal Budget Expenditures by Chapter, 2018 to 2020**

Chapter	2018 (billion rubles)	2019 (billion rubles)	2020 (billion rubles)	Change (percent)
General Government Administration	1,305.8	1,243.5	1,238.9	-2.6
National Defense	2,771.8	2,798.5	2,808.3	0.7
National Security and Law Enforcement	2,108.1	2,131.0	2,140.7	0.8
National Economy	2,404.1	2,376.9	2,438.7	0.7
Housing and Utilities Infrastructure	125.8	98.5	91.0	-14.9
Environmental Protection	88.8	92.8	98.2	5.2
Education	663.2	653.4	668.9	0.4
Culture and Cinematography	93.7	89.2	84.5	-5.0
Health Care	460.3	428.5	499.4	4.2
Social Policy	4,706.1	4,741.8	4,873.3	1.8
Sport	59.2	37.3	38.9	-18.9
Mass Media	82.7	67.8	67.9	-9.4
Public and Municipal Debt Service	824.3	819.1	869.8	2.7
Transfers to Regional Budgets	835.3	795.4	808.2	-1.6
Total	16,529.2	16,373.7	16,726.7	0.6

SOURCES: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2017; Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2018; calculations by authors.

NOTE: Percent change represents average annual change from 2018 to 2020.

**Figure A.3**  
**Russian Federal Budget Surpluses and Deficits: 2007–2017, in Trillions of Rubles, Nominal**



SOURCE: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, 2020.

NOTE: Total revenues less expenditures in nominal values.

## Data on State-Directed Political and Economic Engagement

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**Table B.1**  
**Russia's MPK Meetings at Minister Level or Higher, 2012 to 2017**

Country	Designation	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Algeria	Non-Western	—	1	—	1	—	1
Angola	Non-Western	1	—	—	1	1	—
Austria	Western	1	—	—	—	1	—
Bahrain	Non-Western	—	—	—	—	—	1
Belgium	Western	—	1	—	—	1	—
Brazil	Non-Western	—	1	—	1	—	—
Bulgaria	Western	—	—	—	—	1	—
Canada	Western	—	1	—	—	—	—
China	Non-Western	6	6	7	7	8	9
Colombia	Non-Western	—	1	—	—	—	1
Croatia	Western	—	—	—	—	—	1
Cuba	Non-Western	1	1	1	1	1	1
Czech Republic	Western	1	—	—	—	1	1
Denmark	Western	—	1	—	—	—	—
Egypt	Non-Western	—	—	1	—	1	1
Finland	Western	—	1	—	—	1	—
France	Western	2	2	—	—	1	2
Germany	Western	2	1	—	—	2	1
Greece	Western	—	1	—	1	1	—
Guinea	Non-Western	—	1	—	—	1	1
Hungary	Western	—	—	—	1	1	1

**Table B.1—Continued**

Country	Designation	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
India	Non-Western	1	1	1	1	1	—
Indonesia	Non-Western	1	—	1	1	1	—
Iran	Non-Western	—	1	1	1	1	—
Iraq	Non-Western	—	—	—	—	1	—
Israel	Western	1	1	—	1	1	1
Italy	Western	1	—	—	—	1	1
Japan	Non-Western	1	—	—	1	1	1
Jordan	Non-Western	—	1	1	—	1	—
Kuwait	Non-Western	—	—	—	1	1	—
Mongolia	Non-Western	1	1	1	1	1	—
Morocco	Non-Western	—	—	1	—	—	1
Namibia	Non-Western	1	—	—	—	1	1
Netherlands	Western	—	1	—	—	—	—
Nicaragua	Non-Western	1	1	1	—	—	—
Nigeria	Non-Western	—	—	—	—	1	—
Norway	Western	1	1	—	—	—	1
Pakistan	Non-Western	1	—	1	1	—	1
Poland	Western	1	1	—	—	—	—
Qatar	Non-Western	—	—	—	1	1	1
Saudi Arabia	Non-Western	—	—	—	1	—	1
Serbia	Western	1	1	1	1	1	—
Singapore	Non-Western	1	1	1	1	1	1
Slovakia	Western	—	1	—	1	—	1
Slovenia	Western	1	1	1	1	1	1
South Africa	Non-Western	1	—	1	1	1	1
South Korea	Non-Western	1	1	—	1	1	1
Spain	Western	—	—	—	1	—	1
Sudan	Non-Western	—	1	1	1	1	1
Sweden	Western	—	1	—	—	—	—
Switzerland	Western	1	1	—	1	1	1
Thailand	Non-Western	—	1	—	1	—	—
Turkey	Western	—	1	1	—	1	1
UAE	Non-Western	1	—	1	1	1	1



**Table B.1—Continued**

Country	Designation	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK	Western	1	1	—	—	—	—
Venezuela	Non-Western	—	1	1	1	1	1
Vietnam	Non-Western	1	1	1	1	1	1
Zimbabwe	Non-Western	—	—	1	1	1	—

SOURCE: Data compiled by authors from Russian press reporting and official Russian government webpages.

NOTE: The exception in this table is the MPK with Germany. In this case, the Russian representative at the MPK was the Deputy Minister of Economic Development.

**Table B.2**  
**Bilateral Visits by Select Russian Ministers: 2012 to 2017**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov <sup>a</sup>						
Western Countries	1	1	1	1	—	—
Non-Western Countries	2	1	3	5	4	4
Minister of Agriculture						
Western Countries	—	—	1	1	—	—
Non-Western Countries	—	—	1	1	5	2
Minister of Energy						
Western Countries	1	2	1	1	3	3
Non-Western Countries	1	3	4	6	4	7
Minister of Industry and Trade						
Western Countries	—	1	—	2	3	3
Non-Western Countries	4	3	4	7	9	7
Minister of Natural Resources						
Western Countries	1	2	—	—	1	3
Non-Western Countries	3	4	6	5	4	3
Total for Selected Ministers						
Western Countries	3	6	3	5	7	9
Non-Western Countries	10	11	18	24	26	23

SOURCE: Data compiled by authors from Russian press reports and official Russian government websites.

<sup>a</sup> As of this writing, Igor Shuvalov was still First Deputy Prime Minister.

**Table B.3**  
**Directed Economic Efforts by Major State-Owned Enterprises,**  
**2012 to 2017**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Sberbank						
Western Countries	13	6	5	3	2	2
Non-Western Countries	3	10	4	4	2	3
Gazprom						
Western Countries	11	11	5	4	7	7
Non-Western Countries	5	6	6	8	12	11
Rosneft						
Western Countries	6	9	3	1	7	5
Non-Western Countries	0	14	17	16	16	16
Russian Direct Investment Fund						
Western Countries	3	7	2	1	4	6
Non-Western Countries	3	7	9	14	14	35
Total						
Western Countries	33	33	15	9	20	20
Non-Western Countries	11	37	36	42	44	65

SOURCES: Data compiled by authors from Sberbank, Gazprom, Rosneft, and RDIF official press releases.



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The study of a state's grand strategy can provide key insights into the direction of its foreign policy and its responses to national security challenges. Understanding Russia's grand strategy therefore can help U.S. decisionmakers both avoid strategic surprise by anticipating Moscow's actions and reactions and assess the depth and nature of potential conflicts between Russia and the United States. Because grand strategy is more than a collection of proclaimed foreign policy goals, a country's grand strategy must be understood through both a study of key documents and statements and a close empirical analysis of patterns of behavior. The authors of this report thus both describe Russia's declared grand strategy and test key elements of it against the actions of the Russian state.

The authors performed an exhaustive review of official Russian strategy documents and statements from its leaders and policymakers and conducted interviews in Moscow. Using the information gathered, the authors outlined the broad contours of Russian grand strategy. They then chose six key elements of Russia's stated grand strategy for closer examination: the linkage between internal and external threats, the nature of Russia's role in its immediate neighborhood, concepts about the future of warfare, expeditionary requirements for Russia's military, Moscow's objectives vis-à-vis the West, and Russia's declared prioritization of engagement with non-Western powers. The authors tested each of these elements against empirical evidence about corresponding behaviors of the state. From this analysis, they suggest implications and considerations for U.S. policymakers, both in the U.S. Army and in the broader national security decisionmaking sphere.

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